PIECES OF VĀC

A STUDY OF THE LETTERṢ OF THE SANSKRIT ALPHABET AND THEIR METAPHYSICAL ROLE IN THE EMANATION OF MANIFEST REALITY AS DESCRIBED IN SELECT HINDU TANTRAS

by

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ABSTRACT

In the Hindu Tantric traditions, the emanation of the universe holds within its manifestation the hidden truths leading to resorption. Yet these truths are not as hidden as one might think. In fact, they are constantly present through the concept of *vāc*, "word," in the form of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.

This study offers an in-depth look into the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet as they take part in the metaphysical manifestation of the universe in three schools of Hindu Tantra: Kashmir Śaivism, Śrīvidyā, and Pāñcarātra. Herein, I present the emanation of the universe in regard to the letters through the views of a select group of texts, commentaries, and modern scholarship. It is the goal of this study to isolate the various Tantric understandings of the alphabet while at the same time not losing sight of the alphabet's place in the larger process of emanation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS



LIST OF FIGURES

ABBREVIATIONS

Ahirbudhnya Saṃhitā	ABS
Kāmakalāvilāsa	KKV
Lakṣmī Tantra	LT
Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa	PTV
Śāradātilakatantram	ŚTT
Sātvatasaṃhitā	SātS
Tantrāloka	TĀ
Tantrasāra	TS
Tripurā Upaniṣad	TrU
Vākyapadīya	VP
Yoginīhṛdaya	YH

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND CAPITALIZATION

Throughout this thesis, words from the Sanskrit language will be transliterated using the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration system (IAST). Therefore the transliterations of Sanskrit words appearing in this work will be consistent with most modern scholarship in South Asian studies.

When dealing with grand concepts that cannot rightly be translated into the English language, such as many metaphysical elements of the Hindu Tantric tradition, I make use of capitalization of nominal words. For example, the words "ultimate," divine," "self," and "absolute" will appear throughout this thesis in both capitalized and non-capitalized form. The former form represents a greater concept, often substituting for what the Western mind might consider "God." The latter form will simply represent the word in its denotative meaning.

Mātṛkā is the source of all mantras, the origin of all sciences and the soil from which all the principles, all sages and all knowledge are born.
- Lakṣmī Tantra XX. 52

INTRODUCTION

The most general intent of any worldview, philosophy, or religion is to understand the universe in which we exist. We seek answers and attempt to define the structure of a grand system that does not reveal itself easily. Each system of thought carries notions about the nature of the universe, ranging from the rigorously scientific to the subtly metaphysical, that describe how the universe comes into being. Each system explains what we know by experience and what we attempt to know through speculation. Rarely does one find a worldview in which the universe has always existed just as it does now. The Abrahamic traditions clearly remark on a linear discussion of the universe and time, beginning from a single event and moving in one direction toward final ascent. Some Asian traditions maintain a cyclical understanding of the universe and time, seeing the concept of emanation as repetitive. Even the scientific community, though not through universal agreement, offers an understanding of the universe as emanation from some source, leaving room for either a linear or cyclical slant. The theme in this thesis is the emanation of the universe and the creation of reality, in its broadest sense.

I give this expansive generalization not as an introduction to the specific subject matter of this essay, but as a foundational grounding and ideological backdrop to a much narrower piece of the puzzle. This particular study cannot possibly rein in the immense amount of material in play in regard to the emanation of the universe, and so, instead, I intend to simply look at one aspect of one tradition in an effort to provide a source of information that illuminates a particular cog in the grand machine, all mechanical implications aside. Throughout this study I wish to keep this general concept of emanation alive and well, for to understand something specific and seemingly minute without giving credence the "big picture" would be to actually render its study ineffective and truly fruitless.

Within the vast philosophical tradition that falls under the general label of Hinduism, resides a strain of thought that ties together disparate factions of the Indian subcontinent; this strain of thought is found in both the ancient and modern understandings of the emergence of the universe. Sound, above all else, unites the Hindu grasp of the viable universe with the subtler nature of pure Reality. The broadness of Hinduism's understanding of the power of sound culminates in the concept of *vāc,* "word." Throughout the canon of Hindu scripture and literature, *vāc* has

held a central, yet unassumingly subtle role in the concepts of emanation and eventual resorption.

Nowhere does the emanative nature of *vāc* take on a more integral role than in the tediously scientific formulations of Hindu Tantra. Already a school of thought that focuses heavily on the subtle elements of reality, Tantra elevates *vāc* and the general mystic nature of sound to a level of intense importance and powerful efficacy. Three large schools of Tantra, the Śaivism of Kashmir, Śrīvidyā, and Pāñcarātra, have illustrated their versions of the emanation of the universe and its subsequent resorption through the language of *vāc*. In fact, the term *mantraśāstra*, "teachings of mantra" or "science of mantra," appears interchangeably in these systems with "Tantra,"[1] accentuating the central importance of *vāc* through its use in mantra.

Mantra, though, as it permeates Tantric tradition in its audible form, portrays only one, rather mundane level of *vāc*. Through processes which I will elaborate on below, the mantra itself holds a fairly late position in the emanation of the universe through sound. This late emergence of mantra, however, does not relinquish its importance nor reduce its gravity in the grand spectrum of the Tantric understanding of

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[1] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 103.

the universe. In fact, mantra serves as the gateway toward a subtler realization. Hindu Tantra, much more so than mainstream Hinduism, takes the efficacy of mantra to heart. Oftentimes the casual observer remarks on the meaning of a certain mantra as it translates to definable words and their subsequent dictionary meanings. Yet in Tantric formulations, mantra need not necessarily *mean* anything, at least in terms of mundane word definitions. Therein lies the keyhole to unlock the playfully hidden Reality in the mantra. Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega writes:

> The arcane lore of mantric encryption is redolent with the complex correspondences of Abhinavagupta's *mātṛkāśāstra* or philosophy of language. In this view, the phonemes that compose the *mantras* are expressions of the most fundamental, cosmogonic forces of reality. It is no accident that chapter 30 of Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*...[is] given over to an examination of these fundamental linguistic, conceptual, and world-building correspondences. The complex linkages between *tattvas* (fundamental principles) and *varṇas* (phonemic linguistic elements) are central to an understanding of what Abhinavagupta entails in the process of encoding.[2]

Thus inherent in the phonemes of the Sanskrit language are *tattvas*, "elements," which I will describe below, that correspond to certain letters depending on their place in the emanation or resorption. These qualities allow mantra to contain esoteric meanings that extend far into the

[2] Muller-Ortega, "Ciphering the Supreme," 24.

metaphysical realm. To use a scientific term, Tantra dissects the mantra in order to understand its mechanism and its processes.

The sounds of mantra go much deeper than audible resonation on the gross level, rising to intermediate and higher levels where the mundane vibrations of the mantra become the vibrations characteristic of a dynamic understanding of the universe more attuned with the ultimate Reality of Hindu philosophy. Thus, in mantra, the trained and dutifully initiated ear not only hears the ultimate Reality pulsating through human speech, but also knows that mantra exists *as* the powerful and omnipresent Reality transcending and including the entirety of the universe.

The transition from mundane mantra to full realization of the divine Ultimate (the reverse order of emanation) does, however, require an intermediary step. Logically, and linguistically, this step is the *varṇas*, "letters," which comprise the mantric words.[3] The Hindu grammarians, especially Bhartṛhari, used this logic as a springboard for much of the mystic and metaphysical analysis of the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet. Prabhat Chandra Chakravarti writes that the grammarians

[3] Of course, mantra can often exist as a single phoneme of the alphabet but in the scope of this study, one should understand the subtle, yet key difference between phoneme as mantra and phoneme as letter.

"started with the physical analysis of words and conceived sound [*śabda*] as what clothes itself with letters."[4] Guy L. Beck notes that the seventeenth chapter of the Ahirbudhnya Saṁhitā, an important Pāñcarātra text from the fourth or fifth century CE,[5] reads:

> These alphabets seem to serve a double purpose: enabling the initiate to quote the *mantras* without endangering their secrecy, and providing him with a handle for their mystic interpretation. These lists, then, are an indispensable key to the *mantras*.[6]

In other words, the letters serve as elements of a diagram, mapping out a particular mantra so that one, if knowledgeable, can follow the instructions. Yet at the same time, they contain the immense mystic weight inherent in their nature, hidden to the uninitiated. Tantric understanding of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet derives from the notion that *śabda*, "sound," is identical with the Ultimate, or *brahman*. Sir John Woodroffe, the Tantric scholar who brought much of the hidden school of Hinduism to the scholarly light, wrote:

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[4] Chakravarti, *Philosophy of Sanskrit Grammar*, 85.

[5] Bhattacharyya, *Tantrābhidhāna*, 7.

[6] Beck, *Sonic Theology*, 337.

> The string of fifty[7] letters, from A to Kṣa, which are the Mātṛkā, "is eternal, unbeginning and unending, and Brahman itself." This great saying is the gist of all Tantras. Lest through human error the pronunciation of any letters should be lost or distorted, Vidhātā (Brahmā) has created alphabets (akṣara), and put them into writing.[8]

This linguistic step between the mantric words and the subtler *vāc* will be the centerpiece and focus of this essay. The phonemes of the alphabet, just as the mantra in general, exist on a hierarchy of reality ranging from the most subtle level to the most corporeal. And, just as the Tantric gurus did with the dissection of the mantra, so, too, did they dig deeper into the phonemes themselves. On the surface we understand the letters presented before us as merely symbolic notations of certain sounds present in the words we utter. This, of course, represents the mundane view. If I may again summon a scientific comparison, this gross understanding of the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet would be the physical equivalent of the fundamental particles of matter. For the majority of our purposes, both physically and metaphysically, depending on which metaphor one wishes to use, this level of understanding offers perfectly acceptable results. For the common practitioner, understanding

[7] The number fifty is the most common quantity of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, though variations exist throughout both Tantric and non-Tantric texts and will be noted as such.

[8] Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra*, 194.

the letters as the symbolic building blocks of daily mantras suffices just as does a high school physics student knowing the atomic mass of a proton allows him or her to pass their exam. However, as the scientific community knows well, and as the Tantric gurus have known for centuries, what can easily be regarded as fundamental only satisfies the demands of the prosaic worldview. Indeed, the term *akṣara* in Sanskrit refers both to "letter" and "imperishable" (lit. *a*, "not" + *kṣara*, "decaying"),[9] relating the potency of the phonemes to their fundamental mystic nature. Tantra, just as its philosophical brethren in quantum physics, elicits the dynamic Reality inherent in the seemingly static letters of the alphabet.

This appreciation and dedication to the Reality inherent in the phonemes make up a very large portion of the Tantric literature, and it is the goal of this study to isolate the various Tantric understandings of the alphabet while at the same time not losing sight of the alphabet's place in the larger process of emanation. While I do not intend on formulating anything particularly new or revolutionary, I have prepared this study as the groundwork for a comprehensive look into the specifics of the Sanskrit alphabet as it is understood through the lens of Tantric Hinduism.

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[9] Ibid., 165, 195.

I will structure this study in five chapters. The first chapter will discuss the general understanding of sound in Hindu Tantrism as it derives from Vedic notions of *vāc* and the philosophies of grammar.

The second chapter will cover much of the fundamental concepts of Tantra's *vāc*-based theology and provide a background for the more technical and tedious information in the latter three chapters.

These final three chapters will discuss the use of the Sanskrit alphabet in its emanative aspect in three major divisions of Hindu Tantra. Beginning with selected texts and writers of Śaiva Tantrism, specifically Kashmir Śaivism, Chapter III will discuss their intensely intricate understanding of the Sanskrit alphabet. This third chapter will serve as the bulk of this essay as many of the concepts therein will trickle down into the following two schools of Tantra. In it, I will describe the general understanding of the emanation of the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet. As with all studies in Hinduism, and in Tantra especially, though, I use the term "general" here with the understanding from my readers that no such concept exists in South Asian studies. Thus, my intent here is to offer a starting point and reference to be used throughout the essay.

The fourth chapter will proceed with the philosophical offshoot of Kashmir Śaivism, the Śākta-centered tradition of Śrīvidyā, and look in depth at the alphabet as it emanates through the framework of the *śrīcakra*.

Finally, the fifth chapter will discuss the Sanskrit alphabet's representation in the later writings of the Pāñcarātra school, thus concluding the coverage of the traditional triad of Śiva, Śakti, and Viṣṇu.

As with any study on this large of a scale, and especially on this sporadic of a topic, there are limitations which must be addressed right from the start. First, I am approaching these elements of the alphabet from the angle of texts in translation, specifically translation into English. Thus, I am restricted to Western translations of Tantric texts, of which there are relatively few available compared to the vast canon of Tantric works not even yet translated out of the Sanskrit or vernacular in which they were written. In addition to this restraint, and in order to provide a sweeping survey of the three main traditions within Hindu Tantra, I have focused on just a few particular texts and authors within the traditions that seem to have had the most influence on the respective school's mystic understanding of the Sanskrit alphabet. Certainly ancillary works should not be ignored in a more thorough study, of which this is likely a precursor. Therefore, I have limited my scope to the following: For

Kashmir Śaivism I have looked almost exclusively to the massively in-depth study provided by André Padoux, but also to the work of Paul Muller-Ortega, who writes on the texts, translations, and academic commentary of Abhinavagupta. Their scholarship, in addition to the translations of Jaideva Singh, have contributed greatly to this particular angle. For Śrīvidyā, I have looked to the Kāmakalāvilāsa and the scholarly work of Douglas Renfrew Brooks. Finally, for Pāñcarātra, I have focused on the Lakṣmī Tantra as translated and commented upon by Sanjukta Gupta.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

The Word in the Vedas and Upaniṣads

Even in the earliest forms of the Brahmanical tradition, the Word (*vāc*) held significant meaning on both the corporeal and divine levels of reality. The universe is derived from *vāc* and also exists as *vāc*, therefore all reality must, too, be *vāc*.[10] The great concept of *brahman* certainly equates with the supreme Word, eliminating the possibility for anything to exist outside of the Word. From this Vedic-Brahmanical understanding the various currents of Hinduism developed the Word in several ways, yet the core remained. André Padoux describes this development as a "linguistic theology"[11] in which, even subtly, the Word maintains a prominent position in the understanding of reality and the divinity therein.

The roots of the importance of the Word lie in the Ṛg Veda, where *vāc* plays a key role in the cosmogonical story of the universe. Ṛg Veda 10.71 reads:

> ...when [the first seers] set in motion the first beginning of speech, giving names, their most pure and perfectly guarded secret was revealed through love...Through the sacrifice they

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[10] Ṛg Veda 10.125

[11] Padoux, *Vāc*, 2.

> traced the path of speech and found it inside the sages. They held it and portioned it out to many…[12]

This verse understands the Word on two levels. The first identifies speech as coming from the seers, which logically undermines the notion of the Word as ultimate origin, but the second, subtler understanding notes that speech exists within the sages, implying an earlier origin. Another important element here is that *vāc* gives names, a concept commonly understood in many cultures to be more than just identification, and, in fact often equated with the act of giving existence.[13] In other words, speaking something's name makes it real. Thus the Word operates as *the* creative force of the universe, existing as the origin and the originator. All the realities and possibilities of realities exist within *vāc,* though the universe does maintain structure within the creative force just as the poet creates his or her songs within the boundaries of meter.

Similarly, the Upaniṣads reflect a reality derived from the divine Word. The famous syllable *auṃ* offers the most visible example. Chāndogya Upaniṣad II. 23. 3 reads, "…As all the leaves are bored through by a pin, so all words are bored through by *auṃ*. This whole world is

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[12] Doniger, *Rig Veda*, 61.

[13] Padoux, *Vāc*, 7.

nothing but *auṃ*. "[14] In this case the universe manifests through the Word, in the form of *auṃ*, which is itself divine. This level of understanding satisfies the vast majority of the Hindu tradition, yet there is, of course, a deeper understanding present, and it is this deeper understanding that I will elaborate on in this study.

It is at this level of the Word and phenomenal world, though, that the majority of human beings find themselves, and it is from this level that seemingly all the traditions within India wish to find a way out. That wish, however, does not exclusively denote removal of oneself from the phenomenal world. In fact, the root of the Tantric traditions and the grammar-philosophy of Bhartṛhari, to be discussed below, suggest just the opposite: that it is in this manifest world where the Divine resides, specifically the divine Word, and that knowing the Divine is as simple as knowing the world through empirical language. These notions are certainly not even contemporary with Bhartṛhari or Tantra, either, as the foundation for their formation lie in the Vedas and Upaniṣads. Chāndogya Upaniṣad II. 22. 3-4 delineates the known varieties of phonemes according to their respective forms at higher levels of understanding. It reads:

> All vowels are the embodiments of Indra; all spirants are the embodiments of *Prajā-pati*; all consonants are the

[14] Olivelle, Upaniṣads, 117.

embodiments of Death. If one should reproach a person for his vowels, he should tell that one, 'I have taken refuge in Indra. He will answer you.'

So if one should reproach a person for his spirants he should tell that one, 'I have taken refuge in *Prajā-pati*. He will smash you.' And if one should reproach a person for his consonants he should tell that one, 'I have taken refuge in Death. He will burn you up.'[15]

Thus the phonemes of human language do not exist separately from the divine qualities of the Ultimate and, therefore, identify with the Word in its unitary and absolute form. Taking refuge in the deities which correspond to the categories of phonemes, though, does not suffice for this subtler understanding. The ascent of the individual human being, through his or her empirical language, to the divine consciousness and on to the Word as Absolute requires a deeper, subtler, and more intricately involved understanding of both the phenomenal reality and the ultimate Reality.

Bhartṛhari's Concept of the Word

The rise of Buddhism in India created a stir among those in the Brahmanical tradition and in this age, from the sixth century BCE to the sixth century CE, many revivals and revisions of Brahmanical thought ushered in what we think of as modern Hinduism. While much focus centered on indigenously derived image worship, the epics, and the

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[15] Radhakrishnan, *The Principle Upaniṣads*, 374.

subsequent production of the Purāṇas, the grammarian Bhartṛhari looked back to the Vedas and Upaniṣads for inspiration.[16]

Bhartṛhari lived sometime during the fifth century CE and developed his philosophy of grammar in the *Vākyapadīya*, a work that has only recently been translated and studied outside of India, mostly due to its obscurity and the fact that certain parts are missing. Bhartṛhari theorized that the Sanskrit language is the definitive connection to the Ultimate and through the proper understanding of this language, one can attain the necessary knowledge of the Divine. His concept of the Ultimate is purely non-dualistic and he conceives of *brahman* and *śabda* as coexistent, comprising both parts of the *śabdabrahman*, which is the ultimate Reality.[17] This *śabdabrahman* manifests itself as the known world, including, most importantly, spoken language. Bhartṛhari thus argues that through correct understanding of the Sanskrit language, one can break through the barriers of ignorance that have separated words from the Word and attain knowledge of the Divine. Finally, the last key part to Bhartṛhari's understanding of language, and the element that sets him apart from other grammarians, is his emphasis on the bond between

[16] Coward, *Bhartṛhari*, 17.

[17] Ibid., 25.

thought and language. He claimed that no cognition can exist without language. As opposed to the seemingly logical view that thought must presuppose language, Bhartṛhari suggested the opposite: that language comes before thought, and thus serves as its inner unity.[18] In the words of T. R. V. Murti, "Word and thought develop together, or rather they are expressions of one deep spiritual impulse to know and to communicate."[19] Therefore, the mechanism of thought relies just as heavily on language as spoken word and so thought, then, also contains within it the ability to know the Word.

Bhartṛhari's theory thus accentuates the originality of *vāc* and its existence as all reality. Harold Coward points out this necessity by arguing that to suppose that language is merely a convention proves false since the idea of a convention presupposes language. Therefore even such a notion as God cannot even be thought without first having a language with which to have a thought.[20]

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[18] Patnaik, *Śabda*, 133.

[19] Coward, *Bhartṛhari*, 30.

[20] Ibid., 33.

CHAPTER II

FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS FOR TANTRA

The Stages of the Word

Before I can delve deeper into the intricacies of the Sanskrit alphabet, I must provide the philosophical framework of the Hindu, and specifically Tantric, hierarchy of sound. Bhartṛhari understood *vāc* existing in three levels: the highest is *paśyantī*, the intermediate is *madhyamā*, and the lowest is *vaikharī*. Tantric philosophy of *vāc*, though, added a fourth level of sound above *paśyantī* referred to as *parāvāc*. The addition of this highest level of *vāc* plays easily into the subtle theistic underpinnings of even *advaita* schools of Tantra, as it often refers to Absolute *Śiva*, or *paramaśiva*.[21] The Yogakundalī Upaniṣad, a rather recent text, summarizes the levels of the Word thusly: "That Vāk...which sprouts in Parā, gives forth leaves in Paśyantī, buds in Madhyamā and blossoms in Vaikharī."[22]

Parāvāc operates on two levels at once. As stated before, it can represent the Ultimate and identify with *Śiva* or it can be another term for the *śabdabrahman*. More commonly understood in the latter fashion, the *parāvāc* level of sonic reality is said to stem from the *bindu*, one of the three

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[21] The term *paramaśiva* mostly appears in Kashmir Śaiva writings.

[22] Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*, 214.

immediate differentiations of the Supreme. John Woodroffe, under the pen name Arthur Avalon, comments in his summary of the first chapter of the ŚTT, a text composed around the eleventh century CE,[23] that what emerges from the *bindu* is an emanation of "indiscernible letters of the alphabet...in a 'volume of sound' (*śabdabrahman*)."[24] Thus, in this lesser of the two forms, *parāvāc* can be understood as the undifferentiated cacophony of the universe.

However, the understanding of *śabdabrahman* as identical to *parāvāc* is not consistent throughout Tantra. Woodroffe even mentions in another work that "In reality *śabda* eternally exists as brahman,"[25] implying a higher status for *parāvāc* than the subtly differentiated *śabdabrahman.* This discussion, though, sets the stage for the efficaciousness of the phonemes as they emerge. If, as pre-Tantra schools tended to think, the *śabda,* or sounds inherent in the letters of the alphabet, was generated from some source, such as the *ākāśa*, "ether," then there could be no directly divine potency in the letters themselves. The Tantric understanding, though, identifies *śabda,* and thus the essence of the individual phonemes, as self-

[23] Bhattacharyya, *Tantrābhidhāna*, 147.

[24] Avalon, *Śāradā-Tilaka Tantram*, 7.

[25] Woodroffe, *Principles of Tantra*, 171.

existent and merely manifested from the Ultimate[26] or from Auṃ.[27] The difference between generation and manifestation may seem like merely splitting hairs on the surface, but their distinction is of profound metaphysical weight.

Descending from the *parāvāc* toward the manifestation of the material universe, *vāc* arrives at the *paśyantī*, "visionary," stage. Here the phonations of *vāc* are manifested and differentiated beyond the level of static potentiality, but not as of yet perceptible to the mundane aural or cognitive perception.[28]

Vāc then declines to the intermediate stage of the Word, *madhyamā*. Here, sound manifests for the first time into mundane perceptibility, and while it has not yet reached the point of human speech, this is the level where human thought and inner-dialogue begin to emerge.[29] *Vāc* has thus gone from existing as a self-reflection of the divine consciousness to a diversified and manifest self-reflection of the individual consciousness, which becomes individual human beings. While the Tantric schools

[26] Ibid.

[27] Woodroffe, *The Garland of Letters*, 52.

[28] Padoux, *Vāc*, 142.

[29] Ibid., 143.

describe this level as pre-phenomenal and preceding the phonemes of human language, one should recall that under Bhartṛhari's theory of language, even inner thought and individual consciousness can only exist as a result of language. Thought, or consciousness, and the words used to learn and know reality cannot be taken individually and must be understood to be identical in the unity of the Word.[30] Thus it is at the *madhyamā* level of *vāc* that I believe the true potency and power of knowledge as cognition takes place. This intermediate level is the catalyst and the metaphorical boatman that connects the realms of corporeal knowledge and the subtle corresponding knowledge of the divine unity within *vāc*.

The final stage, *vaikharī*, is where the breath and letters come together to put forth the sound vibrations that make up the phonemes and empirical speech. Padoux writes, "The sound vibration, then, is as fully manifest and distinct...as it possibly can be."[31] The universe becomes manifested and human beings within it are granted the ability to communicate using the diluted and diversified *vāc*.

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[30] Patnaik, *Śabda*, 29.

[31] Padoux, *Vāc*, 143f.

The Notion of X + 1

One very important concept to understand in regards to the general Hindu theory of language is unity in diversity or, as I have labeled it, x + 1. Surpassed only by the Buddhist tradition, Hinduism has compiled numbered lists for just about every element of their philosophy. One common trend, though, is for there always to be just one more item tacked on to every list, the + 1. There were originally three Vedas + 1 Atharva Veda, three major divinities + 1 Goddess, three letters in auṃ + 1 auṃ itself, etc.[32] Even larger lists such as partitions of the universe or the number of *tattvas* of Śiva often have + 1 attached. The greater significance of this numeration is the idea that that extra one represents the totality of all those before it. The x + 1 is the unity in diversity, the subtle dynamic energy that both binds and expresses that within itself, including itself. The Word, then, is both the lists and the + 1, though it is through the + 1 that the true dynamism emerges, and thus ignites reality with diversity.

How did the unity of the Word come to manifest as the varied world humans experience? The theories of Bhartṛhari suggest an answer in two parts. First, there is the classic example of *māyā*, "ignorance," pervading the material world. In this *māyā*, humanity has forgotten the

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[32] Ibid., 20.

true meaning of *vāc* and thus lost the connection to the Divine.[33] Similar to the non-dualistic Vedantin's understanding of *māyā,* this ignorance has clouded the material world and made *vāc* appear as many diverse objects and many languages. The second part has to do with the Word desiring itself to be expressed. Bhartṛhari argues that the *sphoṭa,* or inner meaning of the Word and of words, contains *kratu,* an innate energy within the Word loaded with potentiality.[34] This potential is the energy of the Word, the + 1, and the force that supplies its dynamic nature, leading it to manifest into the phenomenal world.

Śakti and Divine Consciousness

The more commonly used term, especially in Tantra, for the + 1 of the divine Word is *śakti,* the female energy. In schools of Śaivite Tantra, especially the Śaivism of Kashmir, the greater Reality often takes the form of Śiva, which exists in a purely static state. This silent Śiva stands in sheer contrast to what I have described as the bursting forth of the dynamically potent Word, understood in this depiction as *Śakti,* the female companion to Śiva. A seeming duality appears here on the surface. The Word only

[33] Coward, *Bhartṛhari,* 33.

[34] Ibid., 38.

represents half of the origin while Śiva represents the other, greater half. While some patriarchal Brahmanical traditions may have wanted it this way, the subtler understanding suggests otherwise. If one factors in the x + 1, we find Śiva to be a very essential part of reality, but the static part nonetheless. The + 1 is *śakti*, the dynamic energy that is non-dual with Śiva, enlivens Śiva, identifies with Śiva, and manifests Śiva into the phenomenal world. Through the Word, the Ultimate, which is the Word, comes to be conscious of itself in diversity.

Padoux writes:

> Śiva is...immanent (*viśvamaya*) and is inseparably united with his energy, Śakti, who is, strictly speaking, the cause and source of the entire manifestation. ...the energy corresponds to the Word aspect of the primary principle; it is self-awareness (*vimarśa*) of the light of consciousness, and that self-awareness gives it life.[35]

Likewise, the Word gives reality life by allowing it to be self-aware in its diversity, carrying with it the knowledge innately present within the Divine. If we understand consciousness as that which defines life and dynamism, then the Word cannot be separate in any way from consciousness because the Word is dynamic and alive.[36] This understanding of the bond between consciousness and the Word ties back

[35] Padoux, *Vāc*, 89.

[36] Ibid., 78.

in with Bhartṛhari's understanding that there can be no words, no thought, and no conscious expression whatsoever without the presence of the Word in the form of language or speech. In relation to my main point, the necessary presence of the Word in consciousness and the active duty of the Word in consciousness provide a direct route from the mundane thought processes, which obtain knowledge to the divine consciousness embodied in the unity in diversity of the Śiva-*śakti* union.

Thus, the very ability for the Word to manifest itself into the phenomenal world displays its dynamic nature. This dynamism pervades all of reality and trickles down from the transcendental levels all the way to empirical levels of humanity, where the Word becomes temporal and subject to human diversity. Padoux remarks, "....the powers that give life to the cosmos are identical with those that make human beings alive."[37] This life need not be understood merely as the biological force keeping humans coherent, but as something subtler that allows one to connect, though this dynamic energy of the Word present in one's consciousness, to the divine consciousness and, indeed, know it.

[37] Ibid., 24.

CHAPTER III

ŚAIVA-CENTERED TANTRA AND KASHMIR ŚAIVISM

The Śaiva tradition of Kashmir, above all others, carefully fleshes out the essence of the Sanskrit alphabet as it plays an integral role in both the emanation of the material universe and the metaphysical resorption with the Ultimate, *paramaśiva.* To do this, Kashmiri Śaivites use what is known as a *mātṛkācakra.* The *mātṛkācakra,* or theory of the alphabet, not only explains the emanation of the universe, but also, very logically, describes the common situation of its practitioners seeking highest attainment while operating out of a purely corporeal existence. This first of the three sections on sectarian understandings of the Sanskrit alphabet will take on a slightly generalized approach, beginning with the common Tantric conceptions of the alphabet and then going more in depth into the specifically Kashmir Śaiva elements. This description of the origin of the alphabet comes from the work of Dirk Jan Hoens[38] and certainly does have its leanings toward the Śaiva and Śākta schools of thought, but it is the best one can do at this point in the discussion.

The Sanskrit alphabet exists in the order it does due to many reasons both metaphysical and phonetical, which, as Bhartṛhari theorized,

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[38] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism,* 98f.

do not necessarily have to exist in different veins. Metaphysically, the understanding of how the Sanskrit alphabet is broken down is best explained by Kṣemarāja in his commentary on verse 3.13 of the Spanda Kārikās:

> ...when [Śiva], veiling by way of sport the real nature of His Self adorned with the Highest Power (parāśakti) endowed with universal energy, desires to display manifestation in different forms, on the screen of His own Self, then His Power of Absolute Freedom...becomes Will which assumes the power of cognition and action. As such that Power of Absolute Freedom becomes two in the form of seed (vowel) and matrix (consonant) which respectively indicate Śiva and Śakti. It also appears as ninefold according to the division of letter-groups (vargabhedena), and fiftyfold according to the division of letters of these groups.[39]

Immediately, though, an inconsistency exists as just a few lines later in the commentary, Kṣemarāja writes of the eight-fold division of the letter-groups, which align with the eight presiding goddesses of the letter groups: Yogīśvarī or Mahālakṣmi for the *svara*, Brāhmī for the *ka-varga*, Māheśvarī for the *ca-varga*, Kaumārī for the *ṭa-varga*, Vaiṣṇavī for the *ta-varga*, Vārāhi for the *pa-varga*, Aindrī or Indrāṇī for the semivowels, and Cāmuṇḍā for *śa* to *kṣa*.[40] These apparent discrepancies can be understood in two ways. First, the ninth member can be understood in the x + 1

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[39] Singh, *The Yoga of Vibration and Divine Pulsation*, 155.

[40] Ibid., 156 n. 2.

model, where the ninth and final grouping of letters is also the entirety. Second, and more in line with the syllabic groupings, the final conjunct phoneme *kṣa* can be considered in its own grouping. In this case, Jaideva Singh notes that the corresponding presiding goddesses vary slightly. The *svaras* are represented by Śiva-Śakti and Yogīśvari moves into alignment with *kṣa*, leaving the rest as they were in the previous order.[41]

Syllabically, the alphabet breaks down more structurally. Deconstructing the alphabet from the top down, the first organizational aspect is the separation of the vowels (*svaras*) and the consonants (*vyañjanas*). The vowels come first and represent the initial stages of emanation. Depending on the particular view, the vowels represent either ultimate Śiva itself or his highest *śakti*. Regardless, *a* through *aḥ* (*visarga*) represent the arising of manifestation and serve as the foundation of all other letters. Thus, Śiva or Śiva-Śakti are present throughout the alphabet.

A is said to be *citśakti*, the śakti of consciousness, and the subsequent source of all letters. It is Śiva, the divine consciousness. Thus *ā* represents divine consciousness and itself, since phonetically, and thus metaphysically, *ā* is the product of *a* + *a*. This union of divine

[41] Ibid., 157 n. 4.

consciousness and itself represents the inseparable union (*yāmala*) of Śiva and Śakti in a state of absolute bliss (*ānanda*).

Next comes *i*, representing the power of will (*icchāśakti*),[42] followed by *ī*, representing the power of sovereignty or of reigning (*īśāna*). The beginnings of light into the process of manifestation occur at the emergence of *u*, which corresponds to awakening or coming forth (*unmeṣa*), culminating in the stage of power of knowledge (*jñānaśakti*). The first six sounds (*a* to *ū*) sum up in the form of *ū*, which represents the *bīja*, "seed," for the entirety of the *svaras*.

The next set of vowels (*ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ*) hold a rather interesting place in the cosmogony of the Sanskrit alphabet and will be treated with much more detail below. For now it will suffice to say that they represent a pause in the emanation and offer a subtler transition of gradation. *Ṛ* is the manifestation of *icchāśakti* in a purely settled form, while *ṝ* represents the same *śakti* in a more unsettled or perturbed form. The corresponding double representation of the power of will (*icchāśakti*) then puts forth *ḷ* and *ḹ* as it reaches the stability of the earth.

The diphthongs (*e*, *ai*, *o*, and *au*) reach the level of power of action (*kriyāśakti*) beginning with *e*, a euphonic combination of *a* and *i*, and its

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[42] The *icchā*, *jñāna*, and *kriyaśaktis* will be discussed in more detail below with regard to the *trikoṇa*.

"long" form *ai*, the euphonic combination of *a* and *e*. The *kriyāśakti* becomes more manifest as the letter *o* emerges from the combination of *a* and *u* and reaches full manifestation at *au*, the combination of *a* and *o*.

The final two *svaras* (*aṃ* and *aḥ*) carry enough metaphysical weight to fill volumes. However, in the terms of basic phonetic emanation they provide both a summation of *svaras* and a fluid transition into *vyañjanas*. The *bindu*, or *anusvara*, represented as *aṃ*, depicts the entirety of the fourteen vowels already manifested and serves to represent the singular, dimensionless point of Śiva in his Absolute form, as is evidenced by its graphic use in the *devanāgarī* script as a singular dot (.). If the *anusvara* as a single point represents the unity of Śiva-Śakti then the meaning of *aḥ* (*visarga*), graphically represented as two points (:), is self-apparent. The division of the ultimate consciousness into two, namely Śiva and Śakti, sets off the creation of the manifest world, and thus at the culmination of the vowels, representative of the divine powers of Śiva-Śakti, *visarga* sets the stage for the next round of emanation, represented by the consonants. Hoens remarks that the second-tier emanation also represents a "liberation" from condensed unity as is evidenced by the escape of breath that is the functional part of *visarga*.[43]

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[43] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 99.

The next stage of emanation of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet covers the emergence of the consonants (*vyañjanas*). Consonants are secondary to the vowels and, in fact, can only exist, phonetically and metaphysically, with the aid of vowels.[44] Vowels are the seeds (*bījas*), the expressive elements (*vācaka*), while the consonants are the wombs (*yonis*), the expressed elements (*vācya*). As Hoens quotes from Jayaratha's commentary on Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, "the vowels are the ultimate cause of all the letters,"[45] and thus every letter from here on out condenses directly from the vowels, which are the themselves direct elements of the Absolute.

The condensation (*ghanatā*) of the consonants goes as follows: *a* condenses to form the gutturals (*kaṇṭhya*), which are the stops (*sparśa*) *ka* through *gha* and the nasal (*anunāsika*) *ṅa; i* condenses to form the palatals (*tālavya*), which are the *sparśa ca* through *jha* and the *anunāsika ña; ṛ* condenses to form the retroflexes (or cerebrals) (*mūrdhanya*), which are the *sparśa ṭa* through *ḍha* and the *anunāsika ṇa; ḷ* condenses to form the dentals (*dantya*), which are the *sparśa ta* through *dha* and the *anunāsika na*; and *u*

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[44] Consonants by themselves cannot produce any vibratory sound. Thus even in their simplest representation the *vyañjanas* are accompanied by the ultimate *svara a*.

[45] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 99.

condenses to form the labials (*oṣṭhya*), which are the *sparśa pa* through *bha* and the *anunāsika ma*. The semivowels (*anataḥstha*) emerge next as *ya* derives from *i*, *ra* from *ṛ*, *la* from *ḷ*, and *va* from *u* (+*a*). Then come the sibilants (*ūṣman*) as *śa* emerges from *i*, *ṣa* from *ṛ*, and *sa* from *ḷ*. The letter *ha* emerges at some point but does not receive direct treatment in this particular rendition of the alphabet. Hoens mentions only that *ha* is a gross form of *visarga*. Nonetheless, *ha* needs mention as it does count in the fifty letters. Finally, the last letter in the emanation of the alphabet is *kṣa*. This combination of *ka* and *sa* represents the entirety of the alphabet as it contains within itself the *a* element, which is supreme consciousness and root of all the vowels, all consonants, and the *visarga* element,[46] as well as the first and last consonants, making it self-inclusive in the total of fifty Sanskrit letters.

Tattvas

The Kashmir Śaiva understanding of the Sanskrit alphabet goes hand in hand with its reliance on the *tattvas*, or elements of reality, which reflect the parts, or aspects, that make up the whole of both objective and

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[46] Though not directly stated, the assumption here is that the *sa* aspect in the combination simultaneously, as is often the case in Sanskrit grammar, exists as *ha*, the grosser form of *aḥ*. Thus the double meaning allows the combination *kṣa* to represent the bookends of both the vowels (*a* to *aḥ*) and the consonants (*ka* to *sa*).

subjective reality. The concept of *tattva* is not unique to Tantra and, indeed, exists prominently in Sāṃkhya and Vedantic philosophy as well. In the philosophy of the Upaniṣads, though, the *tattvas* only numbered twenty-five. In these schools of thought, this number is the point at which the *tattvas* cease. However, as Lakshman Jee says, "...in Śaivism nothing as yet has happened."[47] The Tantric understanding contains eleven more elements that delve deeper into the subtle nature of Śiva, or ultimate Reality. Swami Lakshman Jee presents the complete thirty-six *tattvas* as follows.[48]

The eleven Tantric *tattvas* begin at the highest level of reality with the five *śuddha tattvas* (Pure Elements). They are *śiva* (*ahaṃ*, Ultimate), *śakti* (*ahaṃ*), *sadāśiva* (*ahaṃ* in *idam*), *īśvara* (*idam* in *ahaṃ*), and *śuddhavidyā* (*ahaṃ* in *ahaṃ* and *idam* in *idam*).

Then follow the *ṣaṭ kañcukas* (Six Coverings or Sheaths), the six *tattvas* that the Tantric schools understand as the metaphysical barriers between the higher understanding of Reality and that of the Vedantic schools, through which *puruṣa* must transcend. They are *māyā* (illusion of

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[47] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 7.

[48] Ibid., 1ff. Unless otherwise noted, the list and elaboration of *tattvas* derives from this source.

the mundane self), *kalā* (creativity), *vidyā* (limitation of knowledge), *rāga* (limitation of attachment), *kāla* (limitation of time), and *niyati* (limitation of place).

After the Kashmir Śaiva's eleven higher *tattvas* come the twenty-five standard *tattvas*, beginning with the pair of independent subjective characteristics *puruṣa* (the ego as connected to subjectivity) and *prakṛti* (nature). Then follow the *atahkaraṇas* (Three Internal Organs), or what Swami Lakshman Jee refers to as the "objective cum subjective elements."[49] They are *ahaṁkāra* (the ego as connected to objectivity), *buddhi* (intellect), and *manas* (mind).

The final twenty *tattvas* are considered the gross, or objective, *tattvas* and depict the emanation of the universe from the brink of the subjective state down to the most mundane level of reality. At the top are the *pañca jñāndriyas* (Five Organs of Cognition), which consist of *śrotra* (organ of hearing, ear), *tvak* (organ of touching, skin), *cakṣu* (organ of sight, eye), *rasanā* (the organ of tasting, tongue), and *ghrāṇa* (the organ of smelling, nose). Then emanate the *pañca karmendriyas* (Five Organs of Action), which are *vāc* (action of speech), *pāṇi* (action of the hand), *pāda* (action of the foot), *pāyu* (excretory action), and *upastha* (procreative

[49] Ibid., 5.

action). Next come the *pañca tanmātras* (Five Subtle Elements), which are *śabda* (sound), *sparśa* (touch), *rūpa* (form), *rasa* (taste), and *gandha* (smell). These *pañca tanmātras* derive directly from the last and most mundane five *tattvas*, the *pañca mahābhūtas* (Five Great Elements). They are *ākāśa* (ether), *vāyu* (air), *tejas* (fire), *jala* (water), and finally *pṛthivī* (earth).

The Tantric understanding of the emanation of the universe depicts the entirety of both the objective and subjective world consisting of these *tattvas*. They are literally the ingredients from which the manifest reality is constructed, and yet they also represent the totally unmanifest state of Reality from which they emerged. The highest *tattva*, *śiva*, is both an element of the Ultimate and the Ultimate itself. In view of this, one might understand the *tattvas* to be thirty-five in number, with the thirty-sixth acting as the + 1, representing the rest in their entirety. From this transcendental *tattva*, the remaining thirty-five trickle down from the supremely subtle *śuddha tattvas* toward the very mundane *pañca mahābhūtas*, creating the material world so familiar to the corporeal senses. The tenets of Kashmir Śaivism, and indeed Tantra in general, describe the emanation of the *tattvas* coinciding directly with the emanation of the phonemes. The phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet themselves partake in the manifestation of the universe from the Ultimate, each representing

both an element of the manifest universe and the Ultimate itself. How exactly the emanation of the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet fits in with these thirty-six *tattvas* becomes a complicated manner due to the levels of sonic reality discussed above: *parāvāc, paśyantī, madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*.

Mahāsṛṣṭi

The Sanskrit alphabet is arranged differently and the corresponding tattvas are connected differently depending on the sonic level.[50] The highest level, *parāvāc*, consists of the potentiality for the "great emanation," or the *mahāsṛṣṭi*,[51] of the manifest universe and features the letters and *tattvas* existing in order from highest to lowest. In the kula-related schools of Śaivism, this arrangement falls under the name *śabdarāśi* or *śabdarāśibhairava*, literally meaning the totality of sounds of Bhairava.[52] Thus the emanation takes place beginning with the *śiva tattva* corresponding with the sixteen *svaras* (*a* to *aḥ*). The emanation then moves slowly toward the mundane by connecting *śakti tattva* with the phoneme

[50] For a simple and direct chart of the phoneme-*tattva* relationships at the different levels of sonic reality see Padoux, *Vāc*, 318f Table 5.1.

[51] Padoux, *Vāc*, 306.

[52] Ibid., 306f n. 237.

kṣa, sadāśiva tattva with *ha, īśvara tattva* with *sa, śuddhavidyā tattva* with *ṣa,* and *mahāmāyā* with *śa*. Notice, though, that the last corresponding feature of the phoneme *śa, mahāmāyā,* is not one of the previously mentioned *tattvas* that make up the manifest world. According to Padoux, who references TĀ 9.150-52, *mahāmāyā*, "great illusion," only exists at the *parāvāc* level of the "great emanation"[53] and thus cannot be considered among the elemental aspects of the manifest universe.[54]

Moving further down toward the manifest world, the *anataḥstha* (*ya, ra, la,* and *va*) are connected with the *ṣaṭ kañcukas*. Padoux, however, lists them as five in number,[55] considering *māyā* to be outside the grouping while still enveloping them. Thus *va* connects to *māyā, la* connects with *kalā*, and *ra* connects with *vidyā*. The remaining two *tattvas* of this class,

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[53] Ibid., 310f n. 250. Padoux elaborates that the *mahāmāyā* is the "transcendental illusion" which marks the potentiality for differentiation, during which the characteristic will become represented by the *māyā tattva.*

[54] It should be noted that Padoux also mentions a description from PTV that describes the emanation without *mahāmāyā*, thus connecting *kṣa* with *anāśritaśiva*, another non-*tattva*, and *ha* with *śakti tattva*, etc. (310f n. 250).

[55] Padoux, *Vāc*, 309f.

kāla and *niyati,* become emanated within the whole of the last three semi-vowels (*ya, ra,* and *la*).[56]

The correspondences between phonemes and *tattvas* on the *mahāsṛṣṭi* becomes much clearer and simplistic when we look at the solid consonants (*sparśa* and *anunāsika*). In general, these letters connect to the increasingly mundane elements of manifest reality, which makes sense phonetically if we consider that *sparśa* means "touching" or "contacting," correlating to the increasingly sense-pervaded reality that forms as the emanation occurs.[57] *Ma* connects with *puruṣa tattva* and *bha* connects with *prakṛti.* The rest of the *oṣṭhya* (labials) *ba* through *pa* going in reverse order match up respectively with the *atahkaraṇas* (*buddhi tattva, ahaṁkāra tattva,* and *manas tattva*). The *dantya* (dentals) *na* through *ta* in reverse order match up with the *pañca jñāndriyas*[58] (*śrotra tattva* through *ghrāṇa tattva*). The *mūrdhanya* (cerebrals) *ṇa* through *ṭa* in reverse order match with the *pañca karmendriyas* (*vāc tattva* through *pāda tattva*). The *tālavya* (palatals) *ña* through *ca* in reverse order match with the *pañca tanmātras* (*śabda tattva*

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[56] Swami Lakshman Jee notes that the condensation of the *kañcukas* into four parts results in *kāla* and *kalā* connecting with *ya,* and *rāga* and *niyati* connecting with *la* (*Kashmir Shaivism,* 23).

[57] Padoux, *Vāc,* 309 n. 244.

[58] Padoux refers to the Five Sense-Organs as *buddīndriya* (*Vāc,* 309).

through *gandha tattva*). Finally, the *kaṇṭhya* (gutturals) *ṅa* through *ka* moving in reverse order match up with the *pañca mahābhūtas* (*ākāśa tattva* through *pṛthivī tattva*). Thus the end of the representative emanation arrives at the letter *ka* and the *pṛthivī tattva*, earth. The entire lineup described in the *mahāsṛṣṭi* resides in the potentiality of the Ultimate at the *parāvāc* level of sonic reality.

Mātṛkā

If we move one level down, however, the entire system of phoneme-*tattva* relationships changes, albeit linearly. At the *paśyantī* level of sonic reality (*parāpara*) the manifestation and differentiation of the Ultimate has begun to take place. Whereas the general theme of the phoneme structure on the *parāvāc* level was emanation, the phoneme-*tattva* relationships at the *paśyantī* level represents a reflection (*pratibimba*).[59] The order of the phonemes remains the same, but the corresponding *tattvas* reverse directly, appearing as a reflection of the *mahāsṛṣṭi*. Metaphysically, this plays into the understanding of *paśyantī* as merely a few subtleties away from the Ultimate, *parāvāc*. The entire emanation, and thus entire resorption, is knowable at *paśyantī*, yet it is just

[59] Padoux, *Vāc*, 312.

a reflection of the true Reality. Just as we may see our reflection in the mirror and know most everything about our appearance, we do not quite see the reality of how we appear. According to Padoux, this general theory is unique to Abhinavagupta's writings on Kashmir Śaivism.[60]

This assortment of the alphabet is referred to by the term *mātṛkā*. According to TĀ 3.198, as quoted by Padoux, the *mātṛkā* is the arising of phonemes within the energy emanating from the contact between the "mass of sounds" (Bhairava) and the shadow of the objectivity derived from its act of consciousness.[61] It is more commonly understood as the general term for "mother," and thus *mātṛkā* implies itself to be the "mother" of all the letters *a* to *kṣa*. The sixteen *svaras* continue to be represented by *śiva tattva*, though this time understood as not just Śiva but as a reflection of Śiva in Śakti. As this level, which is one step beneath Śiva, who is the *svaras*, the vowels are not to be understood as the foundation of reality, but as merely reflections of that foundation.[62] The continuation of the phoneme-*tattva* relationships is fairly straightforward

[60] Ibid., 315.

[61] Ibid., 312.

[62] Ibid., 317.

with the understanding that the *tattvas* are simply reflected from the *mahāsṛṣṭi*. However, there do exist a few hitches along the way.

The direct reflection would imply *ka* to correspond with *sadāśiva tattva*, which is does in most listings. The exception is Abhinavagupta's rendering of the furthest point of *paśyantī* as *anāśritaśakti*, another non-*tattva*. Padoux theorizes that *anāśritaśakti* acts as a transitory link between the *mātṛkā* and the *mahāsṛṣṭi*.[63] Whereas in the *mahāsṛṣṭi* the *kañcukas* were condensed into four, in *mātṛkā*, they occur as six in full, corresponding to the letters *gha* through *jha*.

Mālinī

The *mātṛkā* extends further out from Śiva in the emanation of the manifest world, yet it still resides in a realm of heavy subjectivity. The next step toward the objective level of reality comes at the *madhyamā* stage of sonic reality, where the alphabet gets jumbled up, foreshadowing the "gross" level of words and hard letters. This representation of the Sanskrit alphabet is called *mālinī*, named after the Goddess wearing a garland of fifty phonemes (*varṇamālā*).[64] Moving closer toward the manifest, the

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[63] Ibid., 315f. *Anāśritaśakti* acts similarly to the non-*tattva anāśritaśiva* that occurred at its correlation with *kṣa* at the early stages of the "great emanation."

[64] Ibid., 320.

phonemes are in complete disarray in *madhyamā*; vowels and consonants appear completely randomly with the alphabet beginning with *na* and ending with *pha*.[65] Unlike the letters, though, the *tattvas* remain in their regular order. The first sixteen letters of *mālinī* (*na* to *ga*) align with the Śiva-Śakti aspect of differentiated reality while the remaining thirty-four letters (*gha* to *pha*) match up with the corresponding *tattvas* in descending order, *sadāśiva tattva* to *pṛthivī tattva*.

Abhinavagupta formulates two theories on the emergence of *mālinī*.[66] The first, from the PTV, describes it as the dynamic energy of Śakti emerging from the reflections of the *paśyantī* stage. In Padoux's words, "...the *mālinī*, appears primarily as a highly efficacious energetic shuffling of *śabdarāśi*."[67] The second theory, from the TĀ, places *mālinī* as arising from *saṃghaṭṭa*, the friction produced between the *śabdarāśi*, which is Śiva, and the *mātṛkā*, which is Śakti, resulting in the intermingling of seeds and wombs (vowels and consonants), perturbed into creating waves

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[65] The entire order of the phonemes in *mālinī* is as follows: *na, ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ, tha, ca, dha, ī, ṇa, u, ū, ba, ka, kha, ga, gha, ṅa, i, a, va, bha, ya, ḍa, ḍha, ṭha, jha, ña, ja, ra, ṭa, pa, cha, la, ā, sa, aḥ, ha, ṣa, kṣa, ma, śa, aṃ, ta, e, ai, o, au, da,* and *pha.* Padoux notes that there is a variation of this order found in the SātS (a Pāñcarātra text) where *tha* comes after *na* instead of between *ḹ* and *ca*.(Padoux, *Vāc*, 321 n. 272).

[66] Padoux, *Vāc*, 323f.

[67] Ibid., 323.

on the once serene ocean of Śiva consciousness. The sexual imagery here is not without meaning as the sacred act of union pervades much of the Tantric philosophy, especially in regards to the emanation of the manifest world. Padoux notes that these two theories are by no means contradictory, for, in fact, the reflection theorized in the former easily translates into emission, as it is presented in the latter. The central point to absorb here, in regard to *mālinī*, is the efficacy of its understanding as jumbled reality. In other words, the form and structure of the seemingly differentiated *mālinī* depicts the greater idea of unity in diversity present as the seeds and wombs intermingle. Yet, all elements of *mālinī* remain emanations from, and microcosms of, the Ultimate that was present at *parāvāc*.

The Gross Emanation

Finally, the emanation reaches the *vaikharī* stage of sonic reality and the letters have fully manifested into the sensual parts of spoken and written language with which we are familiar. Though veiled in *māyā*, the phonemes contain within themselves the entire emanation process and, therefore, contain extremely powerful potentialities for the adept who knows their nature. Padoux quotes from the TS, ch. 3, "They become thus

efficacious (*śuddhair parāmarśaiḥ*) and therefore are able to bestow enjoyment and liberation."[68] It is at this level that the actual practice of Hindu Tantric ritual comes into play. Though beyond the scope of this study, it is relevant to note that the emanation present within the individual corporeal phonemes is what allows the mantra and ritual placement or visualization of the Sanskrit letters to have any efficacy whatsoever. The compressed letters are, as Abhinavagupta refers to them, *upāyas* or "ways" and "means" for which the adept can attain knowledge of Reality.[69] PTV 8-9a reads:

> Therefore, beginning with '*a*' and successively ending with '*kṣa*' it is known as *sṛṣṭi* or manifestation. O glorious one, this manifestation consisting of '*a*' to '*kṣa*' is always known in all the Tantras as the source of all the *mantras* and incantations (*vidyānāṃ*).[70]

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[68] Ibid., 328.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 88.

The Emanation in Greater Detail[71]

So far, I have described the very general emergence of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet as they are understood in Hindu Tantra. Now, I will look at the same process through a more intense lens, focusing on the tenets of Kashmir Śaivism and elaborating on the metaphysical levels and implications of the cosmogony as it relates to the phonemes.

I will begin with the first sixteen letters, the *svaras a* to *aḥ*. Padoux summarizes these phonemes, collectively corresponding to Śiva, thusly:

> ...each [phoneme] emerges together with a different aspect of the divine energy: they are but aspects or moments of the supreme Godhead when, intent on creation, he goes through an inner evolution which will bring him from a primal and eternal state of transcendent[72] and changeless absolute-changeless but not lifeless of course-as symbolized by the phoneme *a*, to a state where all the energies are fully and intensely awake (*au*); then, after these energies have gathered, as it were, upon themselves, are focused on one point (*bindu*), to an aspect where Śiva will emit, through his energy, the manifestation archetypally contained within

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[71] The details within the forthcoming elaboration on the emanation of the Sanskrit alphabet derive mostly from three sources: Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 98f; Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 15-27; and Padoux, *Vāc*, 235-304. Any direct quote or other source will be noted separately.

[72] Although the word "transcendent" often appears, and will continue to appear, in discussions of this matter, I have a difficult time with its denotation in regard to a non-dual system of philosophy. Given the implications of such a system any use of the word "transcendent" should be carefully considered and never used in direct relation to Śiva, or the Ultimate, as compared to the manifest since the essence of the non-dual outlook negates the idea of transcendence.

> himself, this emission having indeed for its symbol the sixteenth phoneme: the *visarga*.[73]

The *svaras* are so called because they vocalize (*svarayanti*) by producing their own sound. Thus they "reveal their own nature" within the wombs (consonants) and provide the breath (*prāṇa*), or dynamic energy, for the static consonants. Padoux notes that this latter characteristic of the *svaras* demonstrates the large theme running throughout Hindu Tantra, and especially in Kashmir Śaivism, that the macrocosm of the universe is represented in the microcosm of the body.[74] The sixteen *svaras* collectively align with the *śiva tattva* during the *parā* and *paśyantī* stages of sonic emanation, the only subtle difference being that during the former stage, as the alphabet is in *śabdarāśi*, the *svaras* represent the literal "oneness" of Śiva-Śakti while during the latter stage, *mātṛkā*, the *svaras* represent the reflection of Śiva as seen in Śakti. Once the emanation reaches *madhyamā*, the alignment of the *svaras* and *śiva tattva* no longer apply due to the jumbled up nature of *mālinī*. Even more so at *vaikharī* do we find a less apparent relationship between the two. At the level of mundane speech and language, the *tattvic* puissance of *svaras* remains hidden in potentiality.

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[73] Padoux, *Vāc*, 233.

[74] Ibid., 234.

The Vowels: A, Ā, I, Ī, U, and Ū

A begins the Sanskrit alphabet[75] as it also begins the entire manifest universe. It is the fundamental phoneme (*ādyavarṇa*), the original sound from which all other sounds in the Sanskrit alphabet emerge. Phonetically speaking, *a* is the origin, as well as a member of the three fundamental phonemes (*a*, *i* and *u*) from which the rest of the ten initial *svaras* are formed.[76] It is *anuttara*, "none higher,"[77] the Absolute, and manifests as *citśakti*, the energy of consciousness of Śiva. The understanding of *a* as identical with the Absolute is not exclusive to the esoteric realms of Hindu thought. In chapter ten of the Bhagavadgītā, Kṛṣṇa, representing the Ultimate in avatar form, states "Of letters I am (the letter) A…"[78] Commentary on PTV 5-9a begins, "That *anuttara* itself whose nature is '*a*' is all this universal manifestation (*kaulikasṛṣṭirūpam*). This is what is being ascertained here."[79]

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[75] The letter *a* or its direct equivalent begins many alphabets of languages, ancient and modern.

[76] *a*, *i*, and *u* combine in various ways to form *ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *e*, *ai*, *o*, and *au*.

[77] Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 88.

[78] Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgītā*, 266.

[79] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 89.

In many ways the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet epitomizes the x + 1 concept mentioned above. In the PTV, *a* embodies the x + 1 aspect of Tantric metaphysics as it is described as the seventeenth *kalā*, encompassing and representing itself as the whole of the sixteen *kalās*. Commentary on the first verse of the PTV reads:

> '*A*' is the Śakti (*kalā*) who is above the range of *māyā* (*amāyīya*), who is not found in Śruti-*śāstra* (i.e. in the Vedic tradition), who is bliss (*camatkāra*) of the very waveless ocean of consciousness abiding in the natural, supreme Light, who covers both the initial and the final stage of the perfect I-consciousness, which comprehends the entire cosmos which is the expression of the creative delight of Śakti.[80]

In the same vein *a* is also considered beyond *anāhata*, "unstruck," sound. Later in the same commentary Abhinavagupta writes:

> So it is being decisively propounded here that '*a*' is the stage of the highest sound (*parāvāgbhūmiḥ*) in which alone of these letters there is the non-conventional, eternal, natural form consisting only of consciousness. In the nature of consciousness, the omnifariousness of everything (*sarvasarvātmakatā*) is always present.[81]

According to SvT 7.59, *a* is "self-uttered...and dwells within the heart of all sentient beings."[82]

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[80] Ibid., 24f.

[81] Ibid., 91.

[82] Padoux, *Vāc*, 237.

In the non-dual Śaivism, *a* takes on a double role as both source of all energy and all other letters, in addition to being considered beyond the letters (*avarṇa*). *A* represents the *akula* nature within the *kula* itself. In other words, even as *a* is equated with brahman through its identification with *anuttara*, it also represents the *vimarśa*, "reflective awareness,"[83] of Śiva, embodying both the object and subject of Reality (i.e. the static and dynamic aspects of the Ultimate). If we extrapolate the mystic undertones of this understanding of the nature of *a* as both object and subject, and as both static and dynamic, we come to the Kashmir Śaiva ideal of unity in diversity, through the relationship between *vimarśa* and *parāmarśa*, "synthetic, creative consciousness,"[84] of Śiva himself. Thus we have the ultimate awareness split into two unique, but intimately connected facets of the divine consciousness. *Parāmarśa* is the awareness that is responsible for the manifestation, even if it does not play out objectively in this level of consciousness. *A*, the original step toward emanation of the manifest universe as understood in Tantric schools, especially Kashmir Śaivism, is said to be of the *vimarśa*, the *akula* consciousness directed back toward *parāmarśa* through the original divine union. Thus the emanation of the

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[83] Ibid., 239.

[84] Ibid.

manifest universe, stemming from *a*, must therefore also be reflective on the *parāmarśa* level of awareness, or the consciousness of Śiva himself, resulting in the important Tantric mystic notion that even the most mundane and seemingly corporeal elements of this manifest world must innately have within themselves the subtle, yet powerful, *vimarśa* toward Śiva, illuminating them with endless potential for self-knowledge of the Ultimate. On this aspect Muller-Ortega writes:

> While the anuttara is an absolute reality, it is not correct to conceive of it as in any way separate from finite realities. The anuttara is lauded as that which is completely full (paripūrṇānuttara), and as the abode (dhāma) in which everything occurs.[85]

The second letter of the Sanskrit alphabet vocally extends the first. Euphonically, *ā* is the product of a duplication of *a*, as *a* + *a* = *ā* according to the *sandhi* rules.[86] A higher understanding, though, reveals the more metaphysical interpretation of the equation. If we are to understand *a* as the Ultimate Śiva and also understand it as Śakti, in the sense of unity in diversity, then *a* + *a* equates to Śiva + Śakti, resulting in what Hoens notes

[85] Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 90.

[86] Abhinavagupta does note in TĀ 3.160-161 that two *anuttaras* can come together and form either a disturbed energy (*kṣobhātmaka*), resulting in *ānanda* (*ā*), or an undisturbed energy, which would obviously produce the same essence of the *anuttara*. Jayaratha furthers this apparent contradiction by citing internal *sandhi* rules which allow *a* and *a* to come together as *a* (Padoux, *Vāc*, 246).

as *yāmala*, "inseparable union,"[87] and what TĀ 3.68 describes as *saṃghaṭṭa*, "unifying friction,"[88] thus earning the distinction as *ānanda*, or "supreme bliss." Muller-Ortega points out here that the sexual imagery need not be overlooked, as the creation of *ā* stems directly from the powerful union of Śiva and Śakti. More than just metaphorical union, the use of the term *saṃghaṭṭa* implies a certain frictional embrace, "a rubbing or clashing together,"[89] characteristic of lovers in passionate entanglement.[90] As *ānandaśakti*, the phoneme *ā* has taken up partnership with *citśakti*, *a*, to represent the pre-manifested existence at this early stage of the emanation. According to Lakshman Jee:

> ...*cit śakti* and *ānanda śakti*, the energies of consciousness and bliss, are totally inseparable. Where there is consciousness (*cit*) there is bliss (*ānanda*), and where there is bliss there is consciousness. Here, at this stage, the universe has not yet taken its shape. It is only residing in *ānanda śakti*, the energy of bliss.[91]

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[87] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 98.

[88] Padoux, *Vāc*, 244. Jayaratha adds in his commentary to this verse that the union of *a* and *a* is also a *calana* (stir), an *ucchalattā* (springing forth), or a *spanda* (vibration).

[89] Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1130.

[90] Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 109.

[91] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 17.

Yet the emergence of *ā* in the emanation of the universe is not without hints of differentiation. In the euphonic combination, one observes that in order for *ā* to form, it must have the two parts *a* and *a*. Thus *a* has divided itself into component parts of itself, losing the ultimate distinction of *a* without losing the essence of the energy of consciousness of *a*. Whereas *a* contains both *kula* and *akula* in perfect unity, *ā* permits their distinction, though subtly, since they still both remain in Śiva. The distinction, as Padoux notes, lies in the *vimarśa* of *a* that is provided by *ā*.[92] The progression into *ā* also marks a major step toward differentiation in regards to the numerology of lunar days (*tithis*). Beginning with *ā* and continuing on to *aḥ*, the fifteen post-*anuttara svaras* coincide with the fifteen *tithis*.[93]

The third letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, *i*, emanates from the Absolute as a vibratory potentiality for dynamism. *I* corresponds to *icchāśakti*, "the energy of will," and describes absolute Śiva's first signs of intention within the emanation of the manifest universe. At the level of *i*, though, the will still lies dormant in a non-agitated state. The eighth chapter of the TS reads, "The power of will has indeed for nature a

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[92] Padoux, *Vāc*, 245.

[93] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 190.

balanced movement, without specification, toward knowledge and activity."[94] Thus while a creative impulse has appeared in *i*, there exists no sign that it will actually take place. TĀ 3.71 refers to *i* as "the supreme sovereign of nonfearsome energies,"[95] implying the restrained nature of *icchaśakti*. As *i* is still within Śiva, it cannot truly bring about any sort of differentiation. Padoux describes this distinction sans differentiation by calling the arising of *i* part of the "inner evolution"[96] of the Supreme, allowing the foundation of eternality and immovability to remain unshaken, even at the emergence of new potentialities. The first chapter of the TS describes this creative intent as being born out of *ā*, the power of bliss, and emanating as the wonder (*camatkāra*) of *ā* at its own liberation from the purely unmanifested Ultimate.[97]

There are two slightly varying approaches to the emanation of the fourth letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, *ī*. The first, put forward by Lakshman Jee, introduces *ī* as simply a more agitated form of *icchaśakti*.[98]

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[94] Padoux, *Vāc*, 247 n. 58.

[95] Ibid., 247.

[96] Ibid., 246.

[97] Ibid., 247.

[98] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 17.

Though agitated, *ī* still resides within the potentiality of *icchā* and ultimately within Śiva. The second, taking one step further in regard to distinction between the short and long forms, describes *ī* as *īśāna*, "the energy of sovereignty"[99] or "the power of lordship."[100] Both depictions complement each other as the TS says that it is in *icchā* that *īśāna* rests.[101]

Euphonically, *ī* exists just as did *ā*, by the combination of two of its short forms under the *sandhi* rules of Sanskrit. Mystically, *ī* comes about through an intensification of the *icchā*. Commentary on PTV 5-9a reads, "*Icchā* itself wishing to perceive (lit. seize) the future *jñāna* or knowledge through its autonomy becomes '*ī*' which denotes *īśāna* or sovereignty."[102] Here *ī* foreshadows the coming of the next letter, *u*, while also expressing the increasingly growing potentiality of the *svaras*.

The fifth letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, *u*, continues the growing internal desire of Śiva to manifest the universe. It is referred to as *unmeṣa*, the awakening or revelation, and essentially brings about the intention of the Ultimate to differentiate. TĀ 3.73-74 reads, "This solitary reflective

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[99] Gupta, Hoens, Goudriaan, 98.

[100] Padoux, *Vāc*, 248.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 162.

awareness of the self which occurred previously, which is the unfoldment of the universe of the knowable, [now] exists in the aspect of the power of cognition."[103] It is the stage of emanation at which the objective becomes a possibility, though not yet a viable reality. Lakshman Jee describes the emergence of *u* by saying, "At this point the apprehension takes place in Lord Śiva's consciousness that if I go forward, if I move onwards I may lose my own nature."[104] *U* presents the arising of *jñānaśakti*, the energy of knowledge, completing the foundational energies along with *citśakti, ānandaśakti*, and *icchāśakti*. In other words, *u* depicts the consciousness of Śiva as having not only gained reflection of itself, but also becoming aware of the internal tendency toward desire of differentiating itself and having the knowledge to actually allow such a manifestation to occur.

Ū is the symbol that represents the entirety of the first six phonemes and is considered to be the seed (*bīja*) for the manifestation of the sixteen *svaras.* It is the apprehension of which Lakshman Jee speaks in the previous quotation, marking Śiva's realization of the effects of

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[103] Padoux, *Vāc,* 250 n. 73.

[104] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism,* 17.

differentiation. As such, *ū* is known as *ūnatā*, "lessening,"[105] signifying the loss of presence of the *citśakti* and *ānandaśakti* if the Ultimate is to manifest. Just as with the previous two long *svaras*, the *ū* emanates following the union of *u* and *u* and, as with *i* and *ī*, it maintains the same *śakti* of knowledge, *jñānaśakti*, only varying in its degree of agitation. TĀ 3.75-376 says, "When, as revelation becomes more marked, the objective aspect [of power of cognition] sustains a great disturbance, then deficiency (*ūnatā*) arises in pure consciousness."[106] Mirroring the previous pair of phonemes, *ūnatā* rests in *unmeṣa*. The transition from *u* to *ū* is captured in explicit detail in Abhinavagupta's commentary on the PTV:

> When *unmeṣa* or the arising of knowledge (*unmiṣattā*) has, in consciousness, the desire for further objectivity (*unmimiṣatāyām*), the transcendental consciousness becomes diminished (*ūnibhūta anuttarasaṃvit*) owing to contraction (*saṅkocavaśena*) which is due to all forms lying within or tending to assume subsequent objectivity (*antaḥprāṇa sarvasvarūpa-unmeṣottaraika-rūpairapi*) and to the multitude of existents which lie within as nearly objective, in which the aspect of difference is almost indistinct and which are tending to appear objectively (*antaḥkaraṇa-vedyadeśīya-asphuṭa-prāyabhedāṃśa-bhāsanānabhāvarāśibhiḥ*). This reduced consciousness, because of its retention within itself of all objectivity (*sarvabhāvagarbhīkāreṇa*), is like the udder of the wish-fulfilling celestial cow, viz. the *parāśakti* (*anaṅga-*

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105 Padoux notes that in ABS 16.47, a Pāñcarātra text, *ū* is aligned with *ūṇarūpa* (*Vāc*, 251 n. 78) and that in the third chapter of the TS *ū* is referred to as *ūrmi*, "waves" (*Vāc*, 253).

106 Padoux, *Vāc*, 251.

dhainavīrūpā-paradevatāyāḥ-ūdhorūpā), and upholding the multitude of entire objectivity, becomes manifest (*sphuṭa*), wide-spreading *jñāna śakti*, i.e. ' *ū*'.[107]

Thus concludes the initial six vowels, from which the remaining *svaras* as well as the consonants emerge. The PTV notes, "The vowels which are up to the end of ' *ū*' are known as *tithīśa*, because out of them, the other remaining phonemes are born."[108] The three fundamental phonemes of this group (*a, i,* and *u*) act as a triad of the energies of Śiva, *anuttara* (energy of consciousness), *icchā* (energy of will), and *unmeṣa* (energy of cognition or awakening). They are completely self-existent and act as *bījas* for the remaining *svaras* and *vyañjanas*. According to TĀ 3.192b-193a, *a, i,* and *u* act as "the supreme effulgence of Bhairava (Śiva), the power of the Supreme Lord in all its fullness."[109]

Abhinavagupta sums up the first six phonemes in the third chapter of the TS:

> The first three [phonetic] awarenesses (*parāmarśa: a, i, u*) being essentially on the side of the aspect of light [of consciousness] (*prakāśabhāgasāratvāt*), are solar (*sūryātakam*). In the three other ones [ā, ī, ū] dominates delight (*āhlāda*), which is essentially rest (*viśrānti*); they have, therefore, the

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[107] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 162f.

[108] Ibid., 211.

[109] Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 115.

> nature of the moon. It is understood, however, that [in both cases] there is no aspect of or element of action (*karmāṃśa*)...[110]

The last sentence captures the essence of these letters compared with the letters to come in regard to the overall emanation of the alphabet and its subsequent mystic underpinnings. *A* though *ū* present the most subtle levels of manifestation and, in fact, merely suppose the act itself without giving any indication that Śiva will actually carry through. The phonemes that follow illustrate the potentiality of these first six in dynamic action, though not without first going through a rather profound hesitation that coincides with the emergence of the *amṛta bīja*, "liquids."

The Vowels: Ṛ, Ṝ, Ḷ, and Ḹ (The Vocalic Liquids)

The vocalic liquids present an intriguing point in the Sanskrit alphabet both for their uniqueness and for their position in the grand emanation of the manifest world. I have not come across a satisfactory phonetic explanation for the emergence of the phonemes *ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ*[111]

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[110] Padoux, *Vāc*, 254.

[111] In fact, *ḹ* only exists on a purely theoretical level as it is not found in actual use.

within Hindu Tantra.[112] The best explanation I have found on this level is repeated by both Hoens and Padoux.[113] They assert that *ṛ* derives from *i*, *icchāśakti*, though in a totally unperturbed, stable state. *Ṝ* then emerges as a slightly more agitated, yet still extremely stable, version of *ṛ*. At the point at which *ṛ* and *ṝ* acquire the stability of the earth (*sthairya*, *niścalatā*) they become represented by *ḷ* and *ḹ*. As to why these phonemes are placed in all representations of the Sanskrit alphabet between *ū* and *e*, making them a sudden stop in the fluid motion toward manifestation, is unclear from the standpoint of pure syllabic understanding. The metaphysical interpretation of this placement, however, allows for much more insight.

Just as with the initial six phonemes, the vocalic liquids exist and occur within the consciousness of Śiva, The level of *ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ* differs from *a* through *ū* in that Śiva has come to a complete standstill, even in the subtle potentiality of manifestation, as if the Ultimate were having a moment of cosmic hesitation. For this reason the vocalic liquids are described as "sterile" and "neuter."[114] Lakshman Jee refers to it as:

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[112] It should be noted, however, that Bhartṛhari (VP 4.148) aligns the vocalic liquids with the phoneme *a* and ABS 16.53 explains them as a conjunction between the sounds *r* and *l* and the vowel *a* (Padoux, *Vāc*, 256 n. 91).

[113] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 89; Padoux, *Vāc*, 256.

[114] Padoux, *Vāc*, 254.

> ...that state where the Supreme, filled with consciousness and bliss, resides in His own nature. He does not move out. Because of this there is no possibility of the universe coming out into manifestation.[115]

This point is a hesitation, after having made such intense internal progress in the initial six phonemes. Śiva literally brings the apprehension which first appeared in *ū* to the forefront, allowing it to be expressed in the four phonemes that cannot progress themselves. As I noted before, the vocalic liquids derive from *i* and thus posses *icchāśakti* as their formative energy. Therefore they still possess the highly impulsive will toward emanation, as if the manifestation, even while under hesitation, cannot help but take place eventually. In his commentary on the TĀ, Jayaratha notes, however, that even though the power of will exists in the vocalic liquids, it is not the full emanative will of Śiva. Instead, what pervades the vocalic liquids is only the *chāyā*, "shadow," of the will.[116] Abhinavagupta elaborates on this aspect in the PTV by describing the four vocalic liquids as a state of void (*anāśrita* Śiva) and comparing it to that space in between hops of the frog.[117] This brilliant analogy epitomizes the nature of these

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[115] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism,* 18.

[116] Padoux, *Vāc,* 256f.

[117] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom,* 165.

letters in that it describes them as merely the space in between two legitimate forces at work. Thus they cannot be considered totally inert, but instead maintain the essence of *icchāśakti* and the creative impulse that goes along with it. The PTV continues:

> The consciousness that is *anuttara* (*a*) and *ānanda* (*ā*) does not expand in the first four spheres (i.e. *ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ*) (*na prasarati*), of *kriyāśakti*,[118] for that is an unnamable (*anākhyā*) state, not being the object of name and form (*nāma-rūpa*).
>
> *Anuttara* and *ānanda* being the final support of everything (*paryantabhittirūpatvāt*) and after having been the foundation of the entire activity in every kind of knowledge cease (from expansion), *akṣubdha icchā* ends in *kṣubdha īśāna.* So far as its relation to impetuous eagerness is concerned, it is capable of expanding both in its own field and in *anuttara* and *ānanda,* because of its capacity for succession.
>
> Then that *kriyāśakti* full of impetuous eagerness, penetrating into its own form (denoted by *ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ*) which is void (i.e. devoid of all manifestation), immerges [*sic*] at first into a luminous form which is *tejas* or fire (denoted by the experience of *ṛ*). Thus arise *ṛ* and *ṝ*. How can it be denied that in these letters, the energy of *icchāśakti* (*i*) and that of *īśānaśakti* (*ī*) are associated with the sound of "*R*" whose essential nature is luminosity…
>
> When *icchā-īśāna* desires to enter the void, i.e. the state of *anāśrita* Śiva, who is free of any manifestation, they have first to pass through the stages of luminosity (*bhāssvararūpa*) i.e. the stages *ṛ* and *ṝ* united with the *r* sound. After this, *icchā-īśāna* following the sound '*l*' assumes the form of *ḷ* and *ḹ* which indicates immobility, the essential nature of the earth (*pārthivarūpa-satattva*)…This group of four letters on account

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118 Here Abhinavagupta aligns *kriyāśakti* with the vocalic liquids. However, Lakshman Jee places the emergence of *kriyāśakti* with the next group of *svaras*, starting with *e* (*Kashmir Shaivism*, 19). I find that the placement with *ṛ, ṝ, ḷ*, and *ḹ* to be premature as well, considering that the very essence of *kriyāśakti* implies action and the vocalic liquids represent a state of pure potentiality in repose.

> of its penetration into vacuity is like burnt seed and is said to be eunuch. There is in them no total absence of germ i.e. the state of a vowel. Nothing can exist which is neither germ nor womb, which symbolize Śiva and Śakti...Even in worldly pleasures, there is felicity in repose of this kind. That is why this group of four letters is said to be the germ of immortality.[119]

At this point one cannot help but see the underlying sexual implications inherent in the process of emanation through the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet. While the obvious use of the *bīja* and *yoni* as descriptors for the *svaras* and *vyañjanas,* respectively, needs no further elaboration, the existence of *ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ* at this stage in the emanation takes on a much subtler, highly Tantric connotation. If we consider the emanation of the alphabet as it occurs within Śiva as paralleled to the act of sexual arousal, the imagery of *ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ* as *amṛta bīja,* "ambrosial seed," illuminates the moment of hesitation. Just as the process of arousal features the moment of pause just before emission of semen, so too does the supreme consciousness of Śiva pause after its proto-emanative buildup, before allowing complete *kriyāśakti* to take hold and uncontrollably emit the manifestation of the differentiated world. Padoux writes:

> The inner movement of Śiva toward emanation came to a kind of pause with the four "sterile" phonemes, which

[119] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 165f.

> correspond to the unalloyed power of will at rest within itself. For it is only through the combination, the union of two complementary elements or aspects that, in a system of thought which, like the Trika, is thoroughly permeated with sexual symbolism, manifestation can progress.[120]

Connecting this idea with the last line quoted in the above passage from the PTV the Tantric practice of retention of semen becomes clearer. Padoux comments:

> It might actually be taken as an allusion to Tantric sexual practices, from which these metaphysical considerations may derive, and where the yogin achieves the highest bliss and the goal of his practice if he is able to retain his energy within, that is, to prevent the emission of semen.[121]

The Vowels: E, AI, O, and AU

After the moment of hesitation with the vocalic liquids has passed, the emanation returns to its path toward complete manifestation, beginning the implementation of *kriyāśakti*, the power of action. This *śakti* completes the trio, along with *icchāśakti* and *jñānaśakti*, that forms the *trikoṇa*, which will be elaborated on more thoroughly below. The next set of four vowels derive directly from the combination of pairs from the initial six. TĀ 3.92-94 reads:

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120 Padoux, *Vāc*, 263.

121 Ibid., 259.

> The five[122] [vowels] precedingly [*sic*] described, all springing upwards, mixing and confounding with one another, take on different forms. The Absolute, supreme vibration, and bliss, moving up and rubbing and embracing will and unfoldment, assume the most diverse forms.[123]

The absolute, supreme vibration, *a*, and bliss, *ā*, mix with will, *i*, and unfoldment, *u*, to form these new combinations of both phonemes and metaphysical energies. They are referred to in phonetical terms as the "diphthongs," being the combination of two vowel sounds, promoting the idea that in order for progress to continue forward there must be a union.

The first diphthong results from the combination of *a* or *ā* and *i* or *ī*, making the phoneme *e*. Metaphysically, it is the combination of *cit* and *ānandaśakti* with *icchāśakti*. In the *Devanāgarī* script, as well as in the *Śāradā* script of Kashmir,[124] the letter *e* takes on the appearance of a downward facing triangle, which is often aligned with the notion of the *trikoṇa* of *icchā*, *jñāna*, and *kriyāśakti*.[125] The sexual implications also emerge as the downward facing triangle often associates with the *yoni*, which can

[122] Padoux notes that the TĀ groups *anuttara* (*a*) and *ānanda* (*ā*) together as inseparable (*Vāc*, 263).

[123] Padoux, *Vāc*, 263.

[124] Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 113.

[125] I will elaborate much more on the *trikoṇa* in the following section on Śrīvidyā as it plays a much more prominent role therein.

represent both the maternal womb or the female sexual organ. Jayaratha writes in his commentary on TĀ 3.94:

> By [the term] '*trikoṇa*' is indicated [or hinted at] the aspect of place of birth, in other words of the 'mouth of the *Yoginini*'[126] (*yoginīvaktra*) of this [phoneme]...From this place is born the supreme Energy, as has been said: 'When She comes forth, curved, out of the triangular seat' and: 'the triangle is called *bhaga* [that is: vulva], secret *maṇḍala,* abiding in the sky, its angles being will, cognition, and action while in its center evolves the *cincini* [sound].[127]

Muller-Ortega comments that the potent sexual imagery and metaphysical implications signify the significance of *e*, the first diphthong, as representative of not just sexuality, but fertility and reproduction as the act of manifestation nears.[128]

The next diphthong arrives from the euphonic combination of *a* and *e,* pushing the latter phoneme (which is *i,* since *e* is *a* + *i*) to its *vṛddhi,* "increased," state to make the letter *ai.* It is the coming together of *cit* and *ānandaśakti* with *e*. The resulting imagery of *ai* is of two interlocking triangles. The first comes from the triad *a* + *a* = *ā*, representing Raudrī, Ambikā, and Jyeṣṭhā, and the latter comes from the *a* + *i* = *e* triad, representing *icchā, jñāna,* and *kriyāśakti*. Again returning to the sexual

[126] A female *yogi.*

[127] Padoux, *Vāc,* 266.

[128] Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva,* 113.

connotations in this union of microcosmic phonemes, and thus in the macrocosm of the emanation of the universe, we find that the two triangles, representing the *siddha* and the *yoginī* respectively, interlock as prescribed in the practices of sexual yoga, symbolized by a six-pointed triangle, and universally representing the divine union of Śiva and Śakti.

The combination of *a* or *ā* and *u* or *ū* result in the formation of the thirteenth *svara, o.* It is the *cit* and *ānandaśakti* coming together with the *jñānaśakti* and increasing the potentiality of manifestation of the *kriyāśakti.*

A combines with *o* to make the fourteenth phoneme, *au*. *AU* represents a stage much closer to the emanation of the manifest world and features the *kriyāśakti* at its highest manifestation, matching the full manifestation of the two previous energies. Yet, at this point all three energies still remain totally objective in nature, creating unity within their pure objectivity. On this Abhinavagupta writes:

> The vibration of *kriyāśakti* ends in *au*. The vibration of *icchā* and *jñāna* comes to a stop here, for *icchā* and *jñāna* are included in *kriyāśakti*. In the Trika Śāstra, the nature of *au* is determined as a trident...[129]

Also in the commentary to TĀ 5.60, Jayaratha describes *au* as *triśūlabīja,* which is the seed that is the trident of Śiva's energies.[130] TĀ 3.108

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[129] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 167.

[130] Padoux, *Vāc*, 270.

prescribes that a yogin who gains the ability to totally immerse themselves in the state of unity of the three energies (i.e. of *au*) attains *nirañjana*, a state of perfection, free from all impurities.[131]

The Vowels: Bindu

The final two phonemes of the sixteen vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet inhabit a realm that technically does not lend itself to classification as *svara* or *vyañjana*. Both the *bindu* (*anusvara*) and *visarga* exist as "aftersounds." Just as the name implies, the *anusvara* is that which appends itself to a vowel sound. In the case of the *bindu,* it is a nasal aftersound. Syllabically represented as *aṃ,* the bindu takes the place of the definitive *vyañjana ma* at the end of words. As we saw with the vocalic liquids, *aṃ* exists as a shadow (*chāyā*) of the consonant.[132] Mystically, though, the *bindu* represents the culmination of the first fourteen *svaras* in the single point of its graphic representation (˙). It is the fifteenth *kalā*, or phonetic awareness. This point, dimensionless in nature, is the ultimate Śiva as it exists in pre-manifestation. Its placement here at the end of the *svaras*, though, demonstrates that the physical dimensionless point is yet

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[131] Ibid., 271.

[132] Ibid., 276.

not as subtle as the completely unmanifest Śiva, which would have no concrete representation at all. Thus the emergence of the *bindu* point after the fourteen *svaras* accentuates the increasingly high-pressured potentiality within the *śiva tattva*. Therefore I disagree with Padoux on his statement that the *bindu* is just a symbol and does not represent movement toward emanation.[133] I believe its placement in line with the *svaras* and its position behind the dual point of *visarga* exemplifies a step in the ascension of the manifestation.

In the first chapter of the TS, Abhinavagupta writes, in regard to the *bindu*'s placement during the resorption:

> Then, at the end of the power of action [*kriyāśakti]*, all that was to be done and been accomplished is about to enter into the Absolute, but, before doing so, it all exists as the *bindu* which is essentially knowledge (*vedana*) and pure light (*prakāśamātra*).[134]

Noting the *bindu* as knowledge here is key in understanding the mystic significance of *aṃ*. Jayaratha, in his commentary on TĀ 3.133-134, notes that the *bindu* on the higher level is not the *anusvara* of ordinary speech but instead the "supreme knower."[135] Thus the term *bindu* often is found to be

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[133] Ibid., 272.

[134] Ibid., 273.

[135] Ibid., 273f.

replaced by *vindu,* a description which derives from the root *vid,* to know or to find.[136] Jayaratha continues by asserting that the *vindu,* then, is "the autonomous knower in the very act of knowing. Its nature is light, supreme, indivisible...He never loses anything from its original nature."[137] Thus the whole of that which is "known" resides within the ultimate Self, Śiva.[138] This understanding leads directly to the mystical implications present in the mantra of the self, *ahaṃ*. It features the first, *a,* and last, *ha,* letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, sealed off by the *bindu* as the culmination of Śiva itself.

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136 Whitney, *The Roots, Verb-Forms, and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language,* 159f. One should note, though, that Whitney provides the root *vid* as having these two meanings, to know and to find, as two separate entities. He writes that the derivation *vindu* specifically falls under the latter of these definitions with its use in the Vedas and Brāmaṇas. However, Whitney also notes that in later usage, such as with the Tantric texts, the division between the two definitions becomes unclear, and thus to consider *vindu* as relating to knowing and knowledge is not done in error.

137 Padoux, *Vāc,* 274.

138 Padoux notes an interesting correlation between the idea of Śiva as holding all knowledge and the generally oral lineage tradition wherein the *guru* literally has all the sacred knowledge memorized. Therefore the sacred knowledge resides within the self of the *guru,* the microcosmic version of the Self (*Vāc,* 275).

According to Lakshman Jee, "The letter ' *aṃ*', therefore, shows you that the existence of Lord Śiva has not moved from His own nature even though this whole universe is created in His Self."[139]

The Vowels: Visarga

The final phoneme within the *śiva tattva* is the *visarga*.[140] Phonetically, it is the aspirated echo, or shadow, of the *vyañjana ha* and tends to exist at the end of words in the Sanskrit language. Graphically, it is represented in the *devanāgarī* script as two dots (:) following the previous letter.[141] Metaphysically, the graphic representation gives way to the obvious understanding of *visarga* as the duplication, or more specifically, the differentiation of the *bindu* point into the *śiva bindu* and the *śakti bindu*. The step from the fifteenth *kalā* to the sixteenth illustrates the upcoming manifestation of the Ultimate into apparent duality and, eventually, vast multiplicity. Verbally, it illustrates its proximity to the

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[139] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 20.

[140] A thorough discussion of *visarga*, especially within the Kashmir Śaiva school of Hindu Tantrism, far exceeds the boundaries of this study and so I direct the interested reader to the sixth chapter of Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega's *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, a phenomenally comprehensive and insightful study on *visarga* through the work of Abhinavagupta.

[141] It is also depicted as : in the earlier *Śāradā* script, which mostly found use in the Kashmir region.

manifestation by expressing an echoed aspiration, an escape of breath. The *visarga* is best understood as a reflection of the *bindu*, not simply a division. This is in accord with the *advaita* philosophy of Kashmir Śaivism since the manifestation of the universe does not separate the Ultimate from anything, it merely separates the Ultimate from itself. In fact, Muller-Ortega refers to *visarga* as the "most 'tantric' concept in Abhinavagupta's thought."[142] In the words of Lakshman Jee, "It is not created, it is a reflection."[143]

Visarga is not the beginning of the emission so much as it is the emission itself. Abhinavagupta writes in TĀ 3.145:

> Such is the span or nature of the emission: its nature is to be made of everything it encompasses. So it is with the ocean, which is [nothing else] than the unending succession of its waves.[144]

Jayaratha adds in his commentary that *visarga* cannot be the origin of the manifestation because such a causal role for *visarga* makes no sense as it still resides in a level ruled by non-duality. Abhinavagupta summarizes

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142 Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva*, 124.

143 Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 20.

144 Padoux, *Vāc*, 279.

the idea by writing, "The emittive state is the projection of the Self, in the Self, by the Self."[145] In the PTV he writes:

> That transcendental state whose very nature is an eagerness always to exhibit that kind of multitudinous variety, always goes on expanding from the point of view of manifestation (*visarga*)...
>
> The consciousness symbolized by one phoneme, viz. '*a*' i.e. the *anuttara* or transcendental consciousness indeed by its very nature transcends all concept of space, time and causality and which...is wholly perfect, resorts instantly to the stage of *para visarga*, i.e., the supreme stage of manifestation.
>
> It is only after connexion [*sic*] with the stage of *para visarga* i.e. the supreme creative elan, that there is a the stance of *ānanda, icchā, īśāna, unmeṣa*, its expansion, i.e. *ūnatā* or *ū*, its diversity i.e., *ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ* and the product of *kriyāśakti* viz. *e, ai, o, au*.
>
> That supreme, energy of manifestation (*para* or *śābhava visarga*) becomes supreme-cum-non-supreme energy (*parāpara*) which expands because of its excessive plentitude [*sic*] and because of its being inseparably connected with that supreme energy (*svasattānāntarikatayā*) and instantly becomes the aspect of '*ha*' i.e. *apara visarga* or external manifestation.[146]

Thus the *visarga* denotes the culmination of the entire process I have discussed so far, actualizing the building potentiality of the internal energies of Śiva and his non-dual divine consciousness into the manifestation of the mundane universe. Just as the *visarga* ends the *śiva*

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 181f.

tattva, so too will its mundane form, *ha*, end the emanation of the thirty-five non-Supreme *tattvas*.

Visarga represents the dormant *kuṇḍalinī*, the *śakti* energy present at the microcosmic level of the human being, at the moment of its awakening. Like the *kuṇḍalinī*, the *visarga* is the divine energy compressed, and as it is itself the manifestation, so to does it rise through the stages of outward emanation that will bring about the remaining letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. The *visarga* is the "very cosmic pulsation of the deity,"[147] on the macroscopic level and again correlates on the sexual and yogic levels within the microcosmic realm. The vocalic liquids represent the moment of hesitation during arousal, a point at which the emanation could be stalled and the *amṛta* withheld. The diphthongs represent the progressive nature of the union of the preceding energies, building up to the culmination in the *trikoṇa* and its intimate relationship with the *a, a, ā* triad, resulting in the maximum intensification of the *kriyāśakti*, and pushing forth the act of manifestation. The *bindu* presents the final representation of pure unity, a moment of absolute oneness between the static Śiva and the dynamic Śakti. And finally, the *visarga* embodies the cosmic vibration that ultimately emits the manifest universe through its

[147] Padoux, *Vāc*, 281.

divine pulsation, just as ejaculation on the microcosmic level emits the seeds into the womb. Abhinavagupta writes:

> Śiva intent on creativity in the form of expansion by means of the energy of the great *mantra* of the Supreme primal word, viz. the perfect I, in union with Śakti, in whom the urge for expansion is implicit, and in whom abounds the bloom of the compactness of their energy, becomes engaged in the act of creative expansion...
>
> Then, when an exciting visual or auditory perception enters the percipient, then on account of its exciting power, it fans the flame of passion in the form of agitation of the seminal energy...
>
> When there is the dissolution of *prāṇa* and *apāna* (*marudādi*), in *suṣumnā* which, as the central channel, is full of the storage of the energy of all the senses, then one's consciousness gets entry into that state of the great central *suṣumnā* channel where it acquires union with the pulsation of one's Śakti (*nijaśakti-kṣobhatādātmyaṃ*), then all sense of duality dissolves, and there is the perfect I-consciousness generated by the abundance of the perfection of one's on inherent Śakti. Then by one's entry into the union of Śiva and Śakti (*rudrayāmalayogānupraveśena*) which consists in the bliss of their essential nature of manifestation and by one's complete integration (*viśleṣaṇa*) with the expansive flow of the energy of the great *mantra* of perfect I-consciousness, there is the manifestation of the *akula* or *anuttara* (Absolute) Bhairava-nature which is beyond all differentiation (*nistaraṅga*), unalterable and eternal (*dhruvapadāmaka*).
>
> In the case of both sexes sustained by the buoyancy of their seminal energy, the inwardly felt joy of orgasm (*antaḥsparśa sukhaṃ*) in the central channel induced by the excitement of the seminal energy intent on oozing out at the moment of thrill (*kampakāle sakalavīrya-kṣobhojjigamiṣātmakaṃ*) is a matter of personal experience to every one. This joy is not simply dependent on the body which is merely fabricated thing. If at such a moment it serves as a token of remembrance of the inherent delight of the Divine Self (*tadabhijñānopadeśadvāreṇa*)..., one's

> consciousness gets entry into the eternal, unalterable state (*dhruvapade*) that it realized by means of the harmonious union (*viśleṣaṇa*) with the expansive energy of the perfect I-consciousness which constitutes the venerable Supreme Divine Śakti (*parābhaṭṭārikārūpe*) who is an expression of the absolutely free manifestation of the bliss of the union of Śiva and Śakti denoting the Supreme Brahman.[148]

In regard to the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, this emittive act of *visarga* thus brings about the *vyañjanas,* which are the products of the *bījas* (vowels) mixing with the *yonis* (consonants). Thus every phoneme from here on out results as a mixture of the seeds and wombs, the culmination of the cosmic act of sexual union.

The Consonants: Ka to Kṣa

As *visarga* emits the manifest universe, the remaining phonemes and *tattvas* of the mundane reality below *śiva tattva* emerge, though they still remain metaphysically entrenched within *śiva tattva* due to its + 1 nature. The consonants have no existence in themselves as they are entirely dependent upon the *svaras* for both their origin and their expression. Phonetically, this notion is verified by the fact that a *vyañjana* literally cannot be pronounced without the assistance of a vowel sound.

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148 Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom,* 42ff.

While any vowel sound will do, all *svaras* derive directly from *anuttara*, and thus the common presentation of the consonants is to appear with *a*.

The consonants are subordinate to the vowels because they act passively as wombs while the vowels, as seeds, maintain the dynamic aspect of manifest reality. Yet visually, in the *devanāgarī* script, the consonants take on a seemingly dominant role, leaving the vowels to exist as mere markings or not at all.[149] Thus on the manifest level the *vyañjanas* appear as the higher reality when, in fact, metaphysically, it is the *svaras* that act as the pulse of the universe. They are metaphysically solid, arising from agitation or coagulation within the *svaras.* The consonants are the *vācya,* that which is expressed, as contrasted with *vācaka,* that which expresses, which describes the vowels. One must remember, however, that even on the manifest level of the mundane consonants, the presence of Śiva within the *svaras,* which manifest as the *vyañjanas,* remains apparent. Thus even as the letters are distributed outwardly through both the subtleties of mantra and the grossness of language, they maintain divinity, serving as constant access to the ultimate Śiva.

The emission of the *vyañjana* phonemes is rather straight forward and harkens back to the creative potentiality within the three highest

[149] In Sanskrit there is no vowel marking for *a* as it is assumed to exist wherever there is not a marking to suggest otherwise.

powers of the *svaras, anuttara, icchā,* and *unmeṣa* (*a, i,* and *u*). The guttural letters (*ka, kha, ga, gha,* and *ṅa*) derive from the hardening (*ghanatā*) of *anuttara,* the phoneme *a*. Abhinavagupta writes, "The condensation of '*a*' itself makes the class '*ka*', all of them being guttural."[150] Jayaratha explains in his commentary to TĀ 3.149 that the single letter *a* is able to produce five separate letters due to its inherent five energies,[151] which Padoux notes in this context as *annuttara, ānanda, icchā* (agitated and unagitated), and *unmeṣa.*[152] Lakshman Jee notes that the resulting five consonants derive directly from whichever of the energies is most potent in the reflection with *anuttara*.[153] This, in turn, relates directly to which *tattva* becomes expressed as the alphabet emerges in its *śabdarāśi* (*parā*) form. Thus the emission in which the reflection of *kriyāśakti* dominates brings forth *pṛthivī tattva* (earth) along with *ka,* the emission in which the

150 Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 175.

151 Padoux, *Vāc*, 296.

152 Ibid., 296f n. 203.

153 Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 21. Lakshman Jee uses *cit, ānanda, icchā, jñāna,* and *kriyā* as the five energies in action during the condensation of *a.*

reflection of *jñānaśakti* dominates brings forth *jala tattva* (water) along with *kha*, etc., up to *ṅa*, finishing out the *mahābhūtas*.[154]

The palatals (*ca, cha, ja, jha,* and *ña*) are the hardening (*ghanatā*) of *icchā*, the phoneme *i*. The PTV says, "the condensation of '*i*' makes the '*ca*' class, all of them being palatal."[155] Again these five phonemes derive directly from the mixture of the formative power, *icchā*, and the five energies inherently present. The culmination is a palatal phoneme and its corresponding *tattva*. Thus the emission in which the reflection of *kriyāśakti* dominates brings forth *gandha tattva* (smell) along with *ca*, the emission in which the reflection of *jñānaśakti* dominates brings forth *rasa tattva* (taste) along with *cha*, etc., up to *ña*, finishing out the *tanmātras*.

The next two groups of *vyañjanas* have a slightly alternative route to emission. Both the cerebrals (*ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha,* and *ṇa*) and dentals (*ta, tha, da, dha,* and *na*) derive from the same *icchā* as the palatals, though this time the power is expressed though the vocalic liquids (*ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ*). The PTV states, "The condensation of *ṛ* brings about the '*ṭa*' class, all of them being cerebral. The condensation of '*ḷ*' brings about the '*ta*' class, all of them

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[154] Refer to pp. 32-36 of this essay for the listing of the *tattvas*.

[155] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 175.

being dental."[156] The instant reaction at this notion should be to draw pause and recall that the vocalic liquids were considered "neutral" and "sterile," logically incapable of producing any other phonemes. Padoux notes this paradox and references Abhinavagupta's response in TĀ 3.175-178, in which he argues that the actual power of creation happening at this moment stems from the *icchā*, and it is only through the lens of the vocalic liquids that the new consonants are formed. The vocalic liquids are thus present more to serve the needs of the phoneticians who classify *ṛ* with the cerebrals and *ḷ* with the dentals.[157] According to Lakshman Jee, both sets of five phonemes derive not directly through *icchā*, but through the *anāśṛtaśiva*,[158] a non-*tattva* discussed earlier in its relation to the "void" of the vocalic liquids. The cerebrals emerge from the *anāśṛtaśiva* and its reflection of the five energies through *ṛ* and *ṝ* while the dentals emerge from the *anāśṛtaśiva* and its reflection of the five energies through *ḷ* and *ḹ*. Thus, for the cerebrals, the emission in which *kriyāśakti* dominates brings forth *upaṣtha tattva* (the active creative organ) along with *ṭa*, the emission

[156] Ibid. It is interesting to note that the PTV places the cerebrals and dentals in this particular section as coming after the labials.

[157] Padoux, *Vāc*, 297f n. 208.

[158] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 22.

in which the reflection of *jñānaśakti* dominates brings forth *pāyu tattva* (the excretory organ) along with *ṭha*, etc., up to *ṇa*, finishing out the *karmendriyas*. And, for the dentals, the emission in which *kriyāśakti* dominates brings forth *ghrāṇa tattva* (the organ of smelling) along with *ta*, the emission in which the reflection of *jñānaśakti* dominates brings forth *rasanā tattva* (the organ of tasting) along with *tha*, etc., up to *na*, finishing out the *jñānendriyas*.

The labials (*pa, pha, ba, bha*,and *ma*) derive from the power of the unfolding or awakening (*unmeṣa*), *u*. The PTV states, "The condensation of '*u*' gives rise to '*pa*' class, all of them being labial."[159] They are the product of the power of *jñāna* and the reflection of the five energies. Thus the emission in which *kriyāśakti* dominates brings forth *manas tattva* (mind) along with *pa*, the emission in which the reflection of *jñānaśakti* dominates brings forth *buddhi tattva* (intellect) along with *pha*, etc., up to *ma*, finishing out the *antaḥkaraṇas*.

Jayaratha sums up the emission of the consonants proper in the commentary to TĀ 3.152:

> The second class [of phonemes] made of a fivefold energy is issued out of the Absolute. Then from [the power of] will, in its undisturbed form, connected with the fire or earth, the two [groups comprising] eight [phonemes] beginning with

[159] Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 175.

ṭa, *pa* and so on, are produced by the [power] of awakening. In this way are expounded the consonants.[160]

The Consonants: The Semi-Vowels

The next set of non-*svara* phonemes are not so fluidly derived. The semi-vowels (*ya*, *ra*, *la*, and *va*) euphonically operate as alternatives for regular vowels when placed before another vowel. *Ya* comes from *i*, *ra* from *ṛ*, la from *ḷ*, and *va* from *u*. They are thus also aligned with the phonetic classes as follows: *ya* with the palatals, *ra* with the cerebrals, *la* with the dentals,[161] and *va* as a unique, bilabial classification, which typically comes down to a labial distinction. The PTV, throwing in the sibilants as well, states:

> …'*ya*' and '*śa*' go along with the '*ca*' class; '*ra*' and '*ṣa*' go along with '*ṭa*' class being cerebral. '*La*' and '*sa*' go along with '*ta*' class, being dental. '*Va*' issues from '*ta*' and '*pa*' class i.e. it is labio-dental.[162]

As with the entire process of the emanation of the alphabet, there are mystic underpinnings inherent in the creation of the semi-vowels,

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160 Padoux, *Vāc*, 298.

161 There is assumedly a misprint in Padoux's book (*Vāc*, 299) where he lists *la* as aligned with the labials, yet immediately thereafter refers to a section of the PTV in which Abhinavagupta directly places *la* with the dentals.

162 Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 175.

resulting in various characteristics as well as bringing forth the six *tattvic* internal states of *puruṣa*.[163] *Ya*, as a phonetic result of *i* or *ī* placed before *a*, represents the power of will (either agitated or unagitated) coming toward the Absolute, resulting in what Padoux notes as the seed of wind (*vāyubīja*).[164] Thus this phoneme is characterized by swift movement and correlated with the double *tattvas* of *kāla* and *kalā*, the limitations of time and creativity, respectively. *Ra* forms as the power of will is expressed through the lens of objectivity and light, specifically that of fire, which Padoux notes as an attribute of *ṛ*.[165] Thus the resulting semi-vowel is the seed of fire (*agnibīja*), characterized by the nature of heat, and also brings forth the *vidyā tattva*, the limitation of knowledge. Likewise, *la* forms as the power of will is expressed through the lens of stability, specifically that of the earth, which is an attribute of *ḷ*. Thus the resulting semi-vowel is the seed of the earth (*pṛthivībīja*), characterized by immobility, and also brings out *rāga tattva* and *niyati tattva*, the limitations of attachment and space respectively. *Va* emerges euphonically from *u* or *ū* coalescing with *a*. Thus

[163] These six *tattvas* should be understood as products of the state of *puruṣa* and not as creations of Śiva, since they are limitations. Lakshman Jee refers to these six *tattvas* as *antaḥstha*, "being in the midst or between," another term for the semi-vowels (*Kashmir Shaivism*, 23).

[164] Padoux, *Vāc*, 299.

[165] Ibid., 256.

this semi-vowel arises from the combination of the power of awakening (*unmeṣa*) with the Absolute. According to Jayaratha, *va* is the seed of Varuṇa, which cools and makes the manifestation flourish (*āpyāyakāritva*).[166] Along with *va* comes the *māyā tattva*, the limitation of ignorance and objectivity.

Padoux notes that there may be some confusion as to the difference between the semi-vowels and the diphthongs, seeing how each are formed by the junction of two vowels. He references the TĀ and explains that the diphthongs are formed within Śiva and thus maintain the Absolute as their most dominant feature, while the semi-vowels are formed with the power of will (*icchā*) or the power of awakening (*unmeṣa*) as the dominant member, making the resulting phonemes slightly less prominent in their metaphysical status.[167] Syllabically, this line of explanation makes sense because in the diphthongs, *a*, Absolute, comes first in the pairing while in the semi-vowels, it is the various aspects of the power of will (*i*, *ī*, *ṛ*, and *ḷ*) and the power of awakening (*u* or *ū*) that initiate the contact.

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[166] Ibid., 299.

[167] Ibid., 300.

The Consonants: Ūṣman and Kṣa

The remaining phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet to be discussed are the *ūṣman*, which are the three sibilants (*śa*, *ṣa*, and *sa*) and *ha*, and the conjunct letter, *kṣa*. Like the semi-vowels, these phonemes do not derive their characteristics directly from the energies of Śiva. Instead, they derive from the "swelling of the heat of (Śiva's) own nature,"[168] bringing forth the *śuddha tattvas*, or pure elements. Indeed, in terms of proximate characteristics of the manifest universe, the *tattvas* aligned with these final letters offer the closest realization of the ultimate Śiva. The three sibilants (*śa*, *ṣa*, and *sa*) emerge out of three aspects of the power of will (*i*, *ṛ*, and *ḷ*, respectively), taking residence within the palatal, cerebral, and dental classification of the consonants. According to the TĀ, the sibilants form after the purer forms of *icchā* are met with objectivity that develops as a "steam" or "expiration" (*ūṣman*) and thus produce the phonemes with the same sort of phonic resonance.[169]

Thus, when *i* is roughened (*rūṣita*) by the *ūṣman*, the result is the phoneme *śa*, which brings forth the *śuddhavidyā tattva*, the state of *ahaṃ-ahaṃ* / *idaṃ-idaṃ*; when *ṛ* is faced with the objectivity of *ūṣman*, the result is

[168] Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 23.

[169] Padoux, *Vāc*, 301.

the phoneme *ṣa*, which brings forth the *īśvara tattva*, the state of *idaṃ-ahaṃ*; and finally, when *ḷ* is faced with the objectivity of *ūṣman* in a highly awakened, yet ultimately steady manner, the result is the phoneme *sa*, which brings forth the *sadāśiva tattva*, the state of *ahaṃ-idaṃ*. Abhinavagupta writes, "the entire universe shines within the letter *sa*."[170]

The fourth *ūṣman* is the manifested aspirant, *ha*, described as merely a gross form of *visarga* and thus holding within itself the entire history or timeline of the emanation. It is the closest phoneme to the Absolute, bringing with it the final manifested *tattva* in the form of *śakti tattva*, the state of *ahaṃ*. It is by many calculations the final letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, taking its place within *ahaṃ*, the mantra of the self which begins with *a* and ends with *ha*. Jayaratha, in his commentary on TĀ 3.179, writes:

> The energy of the Transcendent is the *visarga*, of which *ha* is the shrunken, dried-up form (*āśyānaṃ rūpam*), and because of this [direct connection with] the Absolute, it has the same place of articulation as the latter's.[171]

Finally, the last phoneme in the Sanskrit alphabet, as it is rendered in Kashmir Śaivism, is the conjunct letter *kṣa*, known as *kūṭabīja*, seed of

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[170] Ibid.

[171] Ibid., 303f.

"the summit."[172] In other systems of the alphabet, *ha* terminates the emanation, but the Trika, in order to achieve fifty phonemes, adds *kṣa*.[173] It is unique in that it is the only phoneme which brings together two consonants as opposed to two vowels. Padoux comments:

> [*Kṣa* is created] through the bringing together (*pratyāhāra*) of two consonants, *ka* and *sa*, regarded as vivified (*anuprāṇita*), one by the Absolute, *a*, the other by the *visarga*, which is...the energy of *akula*, So it appears as the symbol for the inseparable union of Śiva and the energy, the source of all phonemes, whose series end with a symbol of that wherefrom they were issued.[174]

Thus *kṣa* represents the totality of the entire manifestation, featuring the first consonant, *ka*, the last non-*ha* consonant, *sa*, and the initial vowel *a*. Jaideva Singh comments that *kṣa*, as a combination of two consonants, symbolizes the external and mundane union of Śiva and Śakti.[175] Abhinavagupta's commentary on the PTV extends the metaphysical implications of *kṣa* by describing the conjunct phoneme as a turnaround point for the emanation. He writes that while the emanation of this final phoneme denotes the rise of the infinite manifestations of the

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172 Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 299.

173 Padoux, *Vāc*, 241 n. 43.

174 Ibid., 304.

175 Singh, *A Trident of Wisdom*, 187.

objective world, it also marks the end of the emanation. Factoring in the cyclical understanding of time and the universe, the final stage of the emanative process simply indicates the beginning of the transcendental process.[176]

Thus concludes the general emanation of the manifest universe through the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet as understood in the Kashmir Śaiva school of Hindu Tantrism.

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176 Ibid., 184.

CHAPTER IV

ŚRĪVIDYĀ

Following in the philosophical footsteps of Kashmir Śaivism came the more *Śākta*-centered Tantric tradition of Śrīvidyā. This tradition likely began as a differentiated unit sometime in the fouth or fifth century CE, with the written forms of their doctrine appearing later, around the eleventh or twelfth century CE. While certainly a different school of Tantric thought, the Śrīvidyā borrows heavily from Kashmir Śaivism in the realm of philosophy of sound. The pervasive Tantric emphasis on the importance and sacredness of sound culminates in Śrīvidyā as the *śrīvidyā* mantra, which is the audible equivalent of Śiva-Śakti, the binary pair that holds the greatest significance in the Śrīvidyā school. According to the tradition, the *śrīvidyā* mantra is a culmination of the thousand names of the goddess Lalitā, who is considered the most important manifestation of the Goddess,[177] condensed down to 300 names, and then finally arriving at a compact mantra comprised of fifteen or sixteen syllables, which exist individually as *bījas*.[178] These syllables, though they are just single phonemes, should be understood as sound on the mantra level and not at

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[177] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 73.

[178] Ibid., 104.

the subtly higher level of *varṇa*. Douglas Brooks writes, "Creation in its material manifestations is paralleled in sounds that are metalinguistic formations reflecting the original state of ontological unity."[179]

The Śrīcakra

For the purposes of this study, I want to look at the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet themselves as they are understood in the Śrīvidyā school, and for that one must ascend to the higher focus of Śrīvidyā, and most widely-known visual element of Hindu Tantra, the *śrīcakra*. While the *śrīvidyā* mantra proves to be efficacious, it has various forms depending on the *paramparā*, "lineage," of the tradition in which it used and thus can be viewed as transitory. The *śrīcakra*, however, is viewed as "original" in its cosmic form and therefore unalterable and pure.[180] The *śrīcakra*, or *śrīyantra*, is, just like all yantras, a graphic representation of the absolute Divine, which in this case is Śrī. The *śrīcakra* is literally the entirety of the universe in graphic form, understood as more than just a two-dimensional picture, but as a three-dimensional representation of

[179] Ibid., 60.

[180] Ibid., 107.

Reality. Brooks describes the concept of the *yantra* as it relates both to Śrīvidyā and the more general reality in eloquent detail:

> The *śrīyantra* or *śrīcakra* of the Śrīvidyā school...is a *yantra* in this classical sense: it is a model that parallels the material, verbal, and cognitive realities it represents. According to Śrīvidyā adepts, the *śrīcakra* is not only a blueprint of the primordial creative act in which the One becomes Many, it is the very form (*svarūpa*) the universe assumes at macrocosmic and microcosmic levels. Put differently, the *śrīcakra* is at once the subtle shape or configuration of the universe and the subtle essence of the human body, speech, and mind. More than simply a description of these realities, the *yantra* functions as a road map which, with proper instructions, shows the adept the way back to the ultimate's origins. Not unlike a map, which only symbolizes a corresponding reality, the *yantra* is an index of reality: it is not merely a depiction of reality but its actual, subtle context.[181]

Once viewed in this manner, the yantra takes on the form of a mountain with the center point (*bindu*) as its summit. Herein begins the connection with the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. The *śrīcakra* basically includes a series of nine interlaced triangles of increasing size placed around a central point.[182] Around the triangles are two sets of lotus petals, the first level with eight and the second with sixteen. Surrounding the

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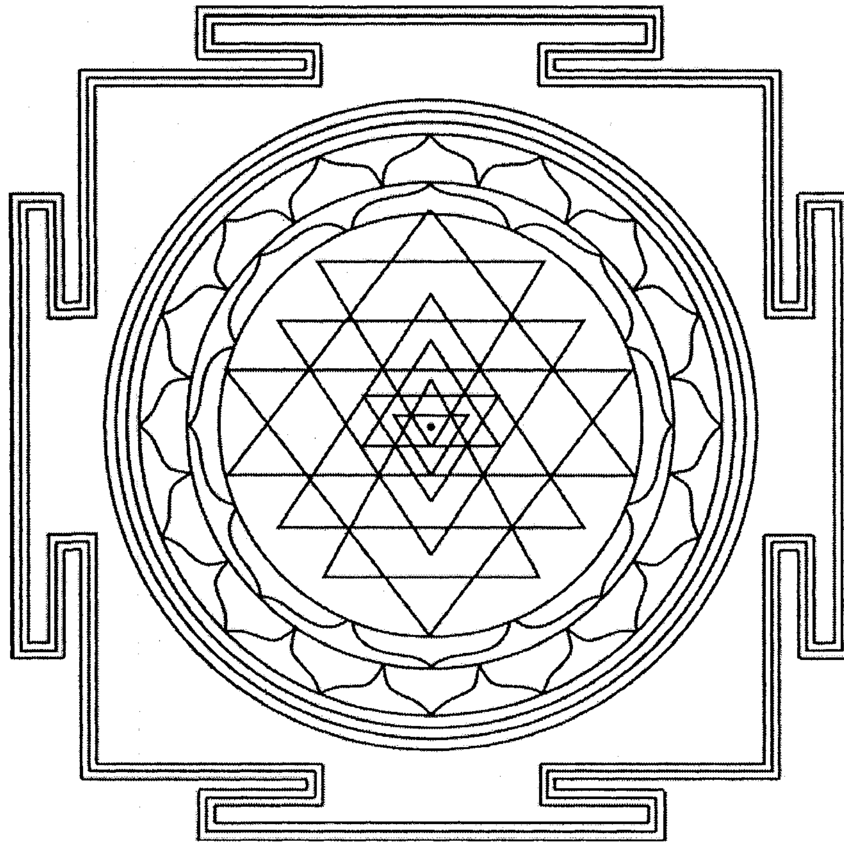
[181] Ibid., 63.

[182] Ibid., 107ff. Unless otherwise noted, the following general description of the śrīcakra derives from this source.

petals are three concentric circles, which are then bordered by four "gateways" which can be depicted as either opened or closed.[183]

The meat of the *śrīcakra* is in its triangles. The nine triangles are divided into five downward-facing triangles, representing Śakti, and four upward facing triangles, representing Śiva. KKV 23-24 identify these major triangles thusly: the five downward facing triangles are associated with the *śaktis Vāmā, Jyeṣṭhā, Raudrī, Aṁbikā*, and *Parāśakti*; and the four upward facing triangles are associated with the *śaktis Icchā, Jñāna, Kriyā*, and *Śāntā*. As I pointed out in the emanation of the letters in the Kashmir Śaiva school, the symbolic image of the interlocking triangles in the *śrīcakra* amplifies the same conjugal concept. Starting from the center of the *yantra*, each downward facing triangle, symbolic of the *yoni* or womb, unites in divine embrace with the upward-facing triangles, symbolic of the divine *liṅga*, or phallus.

[183] The depiction of the *sricakra* on the following page features a version of the closed gateways, promoted by Bhāskararāya. Brooks notes that the Kaulas tend to prefer the depiction with gateways opened (*Three Cities*, 107).



The Śrīcakra. Line drawing adapted from Sri Yantra, Mike Horvath in Wikipedia 2006, reprinted under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 License

Within the *śrīcakra* there are also sub-*cakras* which maintain their own mystical significance through the emanation. There are nine in total, starting with the *bindu* and inner most triangle (*trikoṇa*) as one, continuing outward with the group of eight minor triangles (*vasukoṇa*), the two groups of ten minor triangles, the outer group of fourteen minor triangles (*manvaśra*), the group of eight lotus petals, the group of sixteen lotus petals, and finally the "gateways" of the *śrīcakra* (*bhūpura*). The ninth sub-*cakra* exists as the + 1 element of the *śrīcakra*, exemplifying the unity in the

diversity. The mystic nature of these nine sub-*cakras*, as it plays out in the strongly Śākta aspects of Śrīvidyā, is summed up in TrU 2:

> The nine [sub-]*cakras* created the nine *Yonis*; joined together [to form these] nine [(sub-)*cakras*, there are] nine *yoginīs* [presiding over each of the (sub-)*cakras*]. [There are also] presiding female deities over [each of the] nine [sub-]*cakras*. *Syonā* [the goddess presiding over the *cakras* is the cause of happiness]. There are nine gestures (*mudrās*) and nine *bhadrās*[184] for each place (*mahīnām*) on the *cakra*.[185]

Thus each level of the *śrīcakra* has its own representative *śakti* which acts as an agent of emanation from the top down, and as an object of worship and attainment on the way back up. They are both the creative powers and the veils of Reality.

Taking it one step further, we can also see that each individual triangle within the entire *śrīcakra* has significance and mystic ramifications. TrU 3 reads:

> Originally she was one, she became nine, she became nineteen and then twenty-nine. Then [she became] forty-three. [She is] shining intensely, as if desirous. Let the Mothers [identified with the forty-three *yoginīs* placed on the minor triangles of the *śrīcakra*] enter into me [through the process of *nyāsa* and mantras].[186]

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[184] Mantras to the nine goddesses presiding over the nine sub-*cakras*.

[185] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 157.

[186] Ibid., 160.

Thus the original one, itself a sub-*cakra*, is taken to mean the *bindu* / *trikoṇa* triangle, which becomes nine by adding in the eight minor triangles of the *vasukoṇa* sub-*cakra*. Then one adds the two sub-*cakras* of ten minor triangles to get to nineteen and twenty-nine respectively. Finally, adding in the sub-*cakra* of the fourteen minor triangles, one culminates with the forty-three total triangles serving as *yonis*, or seats of the forty-three *yoginīs*.

Visualized as a three-dimensional mountain, often referred to as *meru cakra* or *Sumeru*,[187] the adept's goal in his or her practice is to scale the mountain from the valleys of the mundane to the summit, wherein one can realize and identify with the true nature of the Divine. This angle is of the utmost importance to the actual practitioner within the Śrīvidyā school and should not be lost in the technicalities of associations with the metaphysical nature of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. It is easy to forget in the tedious listing of characteristics that the premises presented here are religious in nature. KKV 21 reads:

> The wise know no difference between the *Maheśī* [The Great Goddess] and the *Cakra*. *Parā* Herself is the subtle form of

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[187] *Sumeru* is the name of the mythical city located at the center of the universe (Brooks, *Three Cities*, 107).

both these (*Devatā* and *Cakra*). There is no difference between the two in gross form also.[188]

Thus the *śrīcakra* is identical with the Goddess on the level of true Reality and should be rendered as such.

For the purposes of this study I want to look at the reverse process where the universe emanates out from the summit. This is the "inside out" interpretation, the "creation method" or *sṛṣṭi krama*, which aligns with the process of creation and thus the emanation.[189]

Before I carry on the description of the phonemes as they relate to the parts of the *śrīcakra*, I should note that some confusion can arise in regard to what phonemes derive from where on the *yantra*. As I will show below, the emanation of the Sanskrit letters tends to be repetitive and seemingly redundant as one descends from the summit of the *śrīcakra*, leading to considerable bewilderment for the logical mind. Thus, in order to best provide a framework for the following discussion, I summon the comparison between the *śrīcakra* and the fractal geometry of mathematics. For those unfamiliar with fractals, the basic concept of their rendering is that any given point on a particular graphic representation of a fractal appears as if it is the entire function. In other words, each part is

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188 Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa*, 43.

189 Brooks, *Three Cities*, 107.

essentially equal to the whole. Likewise, the nature of the *śrīcakra* allows it to exist as a whole emanative unit, while at the same time offering its parts, the sub-*cakras*, as representations of alternative wholes. I hope this model alleviates any further confusion.

The Emanation of the Sanskrit Alphabet

The *śrīcakra* visualizes the emanation of the manifest universe in the Śrīvidyā school by depicting the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in a descending order, from the summit down to the "valley." Just as in the Kashmir Śaiva emanation, though not as rigorously structured, the letters follow a certain order and represent certain stages of the manifestation, corresponding to certain metaphysical notions of the individual letters. I will frame this particular discussion on the cosmogonic mysticism of the Sanskrit letters by describing their basic process of emanation in relation to the *śrīcakra* as explained in the work of Douglas Brooks,[190] who derives much of this information from the Tripurā Upaniṣad, a later text form the eighteenth century CE,[191] and in the work of Sir John Woodroffe, specifically his translation of *Kāmakalāvilāsa*.

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[190] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 125ff.

[191] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 151ff.

In general it is important to note a few characteristics about the Śrīvidyā emanation of the alphabet as compared to the Kashmir Śaiva approach. As I mentioned in the previous section, the Śaiva schools of Tantra generally accept the count of fifty letters for their rendition of the Sanskrit alphabet. In the Śrīvidyā, however, there are at least two versions of that count. KKV 32 directly mentions the count to be 51: "...by these three is produced Vaikharī who is the fifty-one letters of the alphabet."[192] This numeration includes all fifty phonemes that emerged in Kashmir Śaivism with the addition of the Vedic cerebral *ḷa*. However, Bhāskararāya, in TrU 1, describes the *śrīcakra*, and thus all reality, as represented by forty-eight phonemes. This arrangement does not include the Vedic *ḷa*, since it easily assimilates into *la*, the letter *kṣa*, since it is a conjunct of two other letters, and *ha*, since it is already represented in part by *visarga*.[193] Brooks notes that the forty-eight-phoneme structure is the minority opinion and is offered up in the TrU as a method to harmonize certain auspicious numbers within the Śrīvidyā.[194] Thus when TrU 1 states, "She presides over the three cities and the three paths [and this *śrīcakra*] in which the

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192 Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa*, 63.

193 Brooks, *Three Cities*, 154.

194 Ibid., 246 n. 38.

syllables *'a'*, *'ka'*, and *'tha'* [representing the forty-eight letters of Sanskrit] are inscribed,"[195] it attempts to frame the alphabet into three sets of sixteen letters. The sixteen is significant in the Śrīvidyā school for it is the number of syllables in one version of the *śrīvidyā* mantra. The first begins with *a*, which means all the vowels (*a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, ṝ, ḷ, ḹ, e, ai, o, au, aṃ*, and *aḥ*), the second group begins with *ka* (the consonants *ka*[196], *kha, ga, gha, ṅa, ca, cha, ja, jha, ña, ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, ṇa*, and *ta*), *and* the third group begins with *tha* (the consonants *tha, da, dha, na, pa, pha, ba, bha, ma, ya, ra,, la, va, śa, ṣa*, and *sa*). The breakdown of these phonemes into three plays into the triadic themes of Tantrism in general, yet one could seemingly argue that the addition of the three other phonemes would just as easily lend itself to numerological symbolism. The verdict rests on a matter of preference.

The greater metaphysical issue at hand in this first verse of the TrU is the seminal nature of these initial phonemes. The commentary says, "As the banyan tree is found in its seed,[197] so these [syllables] contain

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[195] Ibid., 151.

[196] Brooks claims that this second group does not actually include *ka* and instead begins with *kha* and goes through *tha* (*Three Cities*, 246 n. 38). In light of the available materials, this claim seems to be in error as the alignment supposed by Bhāskararāya works perfectly stable as it is, resulting in three equally divided groups of sixteen phonemes.

[197] See Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.12.

everything and are complete."[198] While these three syllables clearly refer to their existence on the mundane, *vaikharī'* level, the idea remains present at all levels up to *parāvāc,* including the most subtle form of *parāvāc* at the summit of the *śrīcakra,* the *bindu.*

Bindu

At the center of the *śrīcakra* resides the *bindu* point, central to much metaphysical speculation and generally regarded as the *bīja* of the entire alphabet and thus the entire manifest universe. The *bindu* can represent *visarga,* the sixteenth vowel, and is known as *sarvānandamaya,* "that which consists of all bliss." The inherent split in the graphic representation of *visarga* and the linguistic echo of its pronunciation promote the *bindu* point as a fountainhead for manifestation coming out of the Absolute. As with the *visarga* in Kashmir Śaiva thought, this, too, represents the manifestation itself coming to active fruition. To use a graphic metaphor, the manifestation occurs as a volcano with the *bindu* at the peak spewing forth the manifest universe in the form of the other phonemes into existence.

Naming the sub-*cakra* as *sarvānandamaya* accentuates the achievement one gains upon worshiping the deity with which the

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198 Brooks, *Three Cities*, 154.

particular level is associated, as well as understanding what the role of that particular deity / aspect plays in the mundane world. This trend will follow with the remaining sub-*cakras* as well. For *bindu*, the presiding deity is *Mahātripurasundarī*, who also presides over all the other presiding deities of the *śrīcakra*. In addition to the presiding deities over the sub-*cakras*, each level has its own subordinate deities identified as *yoginīs*, which tend to correlate to the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet present at a particular sub-*cakra*, though even within the Śrīvidyā there is no consistency on this matter, as will be evident below. The classification of the *yoginī* present at the level of *bindu* is *paraparararahasya*, "supreme secret of the supreme." At this unitary level of *bindu*, though, the *yoginī* is also identified as *Mahātripurasundarī*. This particular *yoginī* is also the sixteenth *nityādevatā*, "eternal deity," which correspond to the sixteen *kalās*, or phases of the moon, a fact that will become significant in the later stages of the *śrīcakra* emanation.

The *bindu* can also identify with the divine seed of Śiva, acting as a representative of the *liṅga* within the initial downward-facing triangle, *yoni*, of the *śrīcakra.* The potentiality held within the *bindu* as the divine semen awaits manifestation. Bhāskararāya quotes the *Yoginīhṛdaya* in his commentary to verse 1 of the TrU:

> ...the *baindava cakra* [i.e., the central point or *bindu* of the *śrīcakra*] has the nature of the three Little Mothers (*mātṛkās*) [viz., the devolutions of the Absolute Brahman in the form of sound (*śabda*) known as *paśyantī, madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*] and it pervades the place of the universal waves [i.e., the world consisting of the thirty-six *tattvas*].[199]

The one *bindu*, then, existing within the subtlety of *parāvāc*, holds within itself the other levels of speech, and thus it contains the entirety of the manifestation.

Bhāskararāya's commentary to verse 2 of the TrU lays out the essential triads residing in the *bindu*.[200] There are three categories under which the *śaktis* fall: the *śantā* (her supreme peaceful aspect), the *Ambikā* (the aspect of the supreme Mother), and the *parā* (the aspect of the Supreme). Under *śantā* reside the *icchā, kriyā*, and *jñānaśaktis*; under *Ambikā* reside *Vāmā, Jyeṣṭha*, and *Raudrī*;[201] and under *parā* reside *paśyantī, madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*. Thus, herein lies the potentiality for the expansion of *bindu*, with its triad of triads, into the next stage of emanation on the *śrīcakra*. These triads will differentiate the Absolute and begin to manifest the mundane world while maintaining the inherent nature of these *śaktis*.

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[199] Ibid., 153f.

[200] Ibid., 157, 249 n. 64.

[201] Bhāskararāya comments that these three *śaktis* are complemented by their male companions: *Brahmā, Viṣṇu*, and *Rudra* (Brooks, *Three Cities*, 157).

The KKV exemplifies this as well in verse 22: "The center of Cakra [*śrīcakra*] is *Parā* (*Parā-māyā*). This is *Bindu-tattva*."[202] Bhāskararāya comments on verse 1 of the TrU, "In this [*bindu*] the Great Being is present."[203] Yet due to its high status in the realm of *parā*, shielded by the other layers of the *śrīcakra* I have yet not explained, it cannot be attained, experienced, or understood. Bhāskararāya continues:

> [The Great Being] indicates, then, that it is ineligible [therefore] for external worship (*bahirpūjā*)...Only knowers of Brahman know that [the *bindu*] is identical with the supreme goddess[204] and only within themselves. Others do not know this.[205]

Thus in order for the inner essence of the *bindu*, the seed of Śiva, to be accessible it must manifest into a lower form of existence, which brings about the next sub-*cakra*.

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[202] Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa*, 45.

[203] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 157.

[204] This line echoes KKV 21.

[205] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 157.

Trikoṇa

KKV 22 finishes, leading into verse 23:

> When It (the *bindu*) becomes ready to evolve (*ucchūna*) It transforms and manifests as a triangle. This (triangle) is the source of three (*śaktis*, namely) *Paśyantī* and others and is also the three *bījas*.[206]

Immediately surrounding the bindu is the first triangle, referred to as *trikoṇa* and known as *sarvasiddhipradāyaka*, "that which accompanies all." Its presiding deity is *Tripurāmbikā*, "Tripurā the Mother," and the *yoginīs* associated with the *trikoṇa* are the fifteen "very secret" (*atirahasya*) *yoginīs*. This first layer surrounding the *bindu* is the first product of the actual manifestation of the Divine and thus it creates a ring of objectivity, though still subtle, around the *parā*. Bhāskararāya refers to the *trikoṇa* as the final and closest sheath that hides the *bindu* from the mundane world. Punyānandanātha's commentary to KKV 23 states that the three *śaktis* which emerge are, on the general level, *icchāśakti*, *jñānaśakti*, and *kriyāśakti*, which then reflect the broad levels of *paśyantī*, *madhyamā*, and *vaikharī*.[207]

The placement of the emanation of the Sanskrit alphabet amongst all these metaphysical considerations is brought up in an introductory fashion in KKV 24, which ends with the line, "The two letters (*a* and *ha*)

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[206] Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa*, 45

[207] Ibid., 46.

taken separately and collectively make with the foregoing nine the eleven-fold *Paśyantī*."[208] As I have discussed, *a* and *ha* make up the first and last letters respectively of the Sanskrit alphabet, in its most general layout, and we know from the prominence placed on the self-mantra, *ahaṃ*, that the inclusion of these two phonemes implies the entirety of the alphabet, and thus the entirety of the manifestation. This verse places this notion in context of the *śrīcakra* by offering up these two letters as bookends to the *śaktis* in play. There are first the five *śaktis* of the downward facing triangles (*Vāmā*, *Jyeṣṭhā*, *Raudrī*, *Aṁbikā*, and *Parāśakti*) and then the four *śaktis* of the upward facing triangles (*Icchā*, *Jñāna*, *Kriyā*, and *Śāntā*). With *a* on one side of these nine and *ha* on the other, the eleven-fold essence of the *bindu-tattva* manifests the level of *paśyantī* outwardly. And so, from the level of pure undifferentiated potentiality comes the entirety of the alphabet, containing within it the divine dynamism of the *śaktis*, which will now proceed to pervade the manifest world. This interpretation is not unitary, however, as I will show below that the Śrīvidyā put forth by Bhāskararāya and studied by Brooks presents the *trikoṇa* as symbolic of the *vaikharī* level of speech.

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208 Ibid., 45.

Alphabetically, the *trikoṇa* represents the three letters *a*, *i*, and *e*, metaphysically (and euphonically) combining Śiva, *a*, and Śakti, *i*, to form *e*, which many Tantra scholars have noted resembles a triangle in its *devanāgarī* symbol. Brooks writes, "...the *trikoṇa's* phonic reality in the form of *e* is visually paralleled."[209] Thus the triangle formed by the *trikoṇa* carries significant symbolism as a *yoni,* the central womb to the whole *śrīcakra* and thus to manifest reality.

Broadly, the *trikoṇa* is identified as bringing forth the remaining fifteen vowels (since *visarga* was aligned with *bindu*), though in the KKV's depiction of the emanation as it pertains to the *śrīcakra,* the vowels appear later in the diagram. The vowels are placed around the triangle of the *trikoṇa,* five per side starting at the bottom and moving counterclockwise. Thus *a*, *ā*, *i*, *ī*, and *u* on the right side; *ū, ṛ, ṝ, ḷ,* and *ḹ* on the top; and *e, ai, o, au,* and *aṃ* on the left side. Brooks notes that these fifteen vowels correspond to the fifteen *yoginīs* of the *trikoṇa*, known as *nityādevatās*, "eternal deities," or *tithis*, which are the deities that align with the phases of the moon (*kalās*). They are *Kāmeśvarī, Bhagamālinī, Nityāklinnā*, *Bherundā, Vahnivāsinī, Mahāvajreśvarī, Śivadūtī*, *Tvaritā*, *Kulasundarī*, *Nityā*,

[209] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 125.

Nilapātakinī, Vijayā, Sarvamangalā, Jvalamālinī, and *Citrā.*[210] As *visarga* has already been shown to represent the sixteenth *kalā,* the tipping point of potency between the manifest and unmanifest, the fifteen vowels here symbolized in *trikoṇa* act as the sheaths protecting and hiding the true Reality. Thus Brooks labels them as the devolution of sound and assigns this level of the *śrīcakra* as *vaikharī,* the mundane level of speech.[211]

This ideal fits with the notion of the *śrīcakra* and how it relates to the inner practice of tantric yoga. The *bindu* corresponds to the *sahasrdala* or the *brahmandhrapadma cakra* within the body, that being the highest center, located at the top of the skull.[212] The *trikoṇa,* though, is associated with the *mūlādhāra cakra,* which resides at the base of the spine and represents the lowest yogic center. This jump from the highest to the lowest level of yogic practice in one step is not thoroughly explained, though the likely reading would be to see the *trikoṇa,* though high on the mountain of the *śrīcakra,* as still very much residing in the mundane as compared to the subtle unity of the *bindu.*

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[210] Ibid., 126, 245 n. 41. The sixteenth *nityādevatā* was *Mahātripurasundarī,* associated with *bindu.*

[211] Ibid., 126.

[212] Ibid.

Vasukoṇa

The next level of the *śrīcakra* consists of eight minor triangles expanded (*prapañca*) out of *trikoṇa* known as *vasukoṇa* and referred to as *sarvarogahara*, "that which destroys all disease." The presiding deity of the *vasukoṇa* is *Tripurāsiddhā*, "Tripurā who confers perfection," and the corresponding *yoginīs* are called *rahasya*, "secret." KKV 29 reads:

> The Cakra of eight triangles which is constituted of the letters Śa, Ṣa, Sa and the Pa-varga is an expansion (*Vistāra*) of the middle triangle. These nine triangles together with the Bindu make the ten (*Daśaka*) which are lighted by the light of Cit (*Cid-dīpa*).[213]

Thus this sub-*cakra* contains the last eight consonants (*śa*, *ṣa*, *sa*, *pa*, *pha*, *ba*, *bha*, and *ma*).[214] This moving backwards through the consonants reflects their association with the thirty-six *tattvas* mentioned in the section on Kashmir Śaivism. While no direct correlation between the phonemes and the *tattvas* is made at this level in the Śrīvidyā texts and studies that I have researched, the directional trend of *sa* to *ka* matching with *śakti tattva* to *pṛthivī tattva*, at least in terms of the *śabdarāśi*, "emanation," seems to play out in Śrīvidyā with the initial levels of the *śrīcakra* as well.

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[213] Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa*, 60.

[214] These do not count *ha* since it is spoken for in the *trikoṇa* sub-*cakra*.

According to the Śrīvidyā tradition studied by Brooks, the *vasukoṇa* sub-*cakra* represents all the consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet. Combining the *vasukoṇa* with the *bindu* and *trikoṇa,* then, completes the entirety of the Sanskrit alphabet and thus the entire manifestation. Yet I have only covered a very small part of the *yantra*. In this sense the notion of the *śrīcakra* is immersed in the Tantric ideology of both unity in diversity and also the constant subtle emphasis on the omnipresent totality of ultimate Reality. The *bindu* point, the summation of the *bindu-trikoṇa-vasukoṇa*, and the entirety of the *śrīcakra* all separately represent the Ultimate equally. Even in matters of ritual, this multivalent structure of the *śrīcakra* lends itself to practical application. On this matter, Bhāskararāya comments on TrU 2:

> An injunction in the Tantras states that in an emergency (*āpatkālika*) the summarized form of the [*śrīcakra*] *pūjā* may begin with the *vasukoṇa* [*cakra* consisting of the eight minor triangles and proceed up] to the *bindu* [in the center of the *śrīcakra*].[215]

Each section is a microcosm of the greater *śrīcakra* macrocosm. Thus it truly does not matter where the letters emerge from the *śrīcakra* since every part is also the whole, matching the notion that every letter is equal to the entire alphabet.

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[215] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 159.

However, the mere symbolism of the entirety of the Sanskrit alphabet will not suffice in a subtler understanding of the *vasukoṇa*. The *rahasyayoginīs* of the *vasukoṇa* are the eight *vāgdevatās*, "deities of speech": *Vāsinī, Kāmeśvarī, Modinī, Vimalā, Aruṇā, Jayanī, Sarveśvarī*, and *Kaulinī*. These eight *yoginīs* are the source of the *mātṛkās*, "little mothers," which, as we know, are all the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Each *vāgdevatā* is aligned with one of the traditional eight groupings of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.[216] *Vāsinī* is the source of the sixteen vowels, *Kāmeśvarī* is the source of *ka-varga; Modinī* is the source for *ca-varga, Vimalā* is the source for *ṭa-varga, Aruṇā* is the source for *ta-varga, Jayanī* is the source for *pa-varga, Sarveśvarī* is the source for the semi-vowels *ya* through *va,* and *Kaulinī* is the source for *śa* through *kṣa.*[217]

Brooks accentuates that these emergences of the Sanskrit phonemes should not be understood so lightly as merely sounds of a spoken language. Summarizing the very essence of the alphabet as it is understood in the *śrīcakra,* he writes:

> The sounds themselves...are not mere sounds. They are deities in phonic aspects subordinated to presiding deity of

[216] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 128.

[217] Recall that in certain formulations of the Sanskrit alphabet the phonemes *ha, kṣa,* and the vedic *ḷa* are not included, making the total number of letters forty-eight.

> the sub-cakra; as substances issuing forth from the ultimate, which assume the mundane form of a sound in Sanskrit, they are aspects of consciousness, not insentient entities. Within the *śrīcakra*, these sounds and deities are viewed as part of a deliberate design by macrocosmic consciousness to bring itself forth. Creation is an immanent form of the creator such that transcendence is measured in degrees rather than in substance. In other words, the *śrīcakra*'s devolution is a process of divine sentience assuming increasingly more mundane forms; it is not a process by which the sentient becomes insentient. Not only is the world a manifestation of Śakti as power, the world is essentially animate in devolving degrees of self-consciousness.[218]

The Two Sets of Ten Minor Triangles

The emanation spreads outward, creating two sets of ten minor triangles. The inner set of triangles, referred to as *sarvarakṣākara*,[219] "that which protects all," is presided over by *Tripuramālinī*, "the garlanded Tripurā." The *yoginīs* associated with this level of the *śrīcakra* are classified as *nigarbha*, "hidden." They are placed counterclockwise around the sub-*cakra*, starting at the triangle at the base. The *nigarbhayoginīs* are: *Sarvajñā*, *Sarvaśakti*, *Sarvaiśvaryapradā*, *Sarvajñānamayī*, *Sarvavyādhivināsinī*, *Sarvādhārasvarūpā*, *Sarvapāpaharā*, *Sarvānandamayī*, *Sarvarakṣaśvarūpiṇī*, and

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[218] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 128f.

[219] This level is also technically referred to as *antardaśāra*, "inner ten."

Sarvepistaphalapradā.[220] According to KKV 30, the emanation of the inner sub-*cakra* of ten minor triangles brings forth the letters in *ṭa-varga* and *ta-varga*. Curiously, though, Brooks notes that in the Śrīvidyā ritual manuals, these letters are not the ones which match up with these *yoginīs*.[221] Instead, at this sub-*cakra* in the *śrīcakra pūjā*, the ritual manuals say that the letters *ma, ya, ra, la, va, śa, ṣa, sa, ha,* and *kṣa* emanate. This particular lineup of the Sanskrit letters makes sense graphically since these phonemes serve the back half of the alphabet, typically associated with being closer to the Ultimate on the *śabdarāśi* level of phonetic emanation. There is no definitive indication of how exactly these *yoginīs* and phonemes are matched up, however, and so the more important observation available at this point is to see the cusp between the subtle-leaning elements of the manifestation and the mundane-leaning elements. In other words, these two sets of ten minor triangles act as paralleled images between which lies the line between mystical and material.

Quoting a verse from an unidentified Tantra, Bhāskararāya, commenting on TrU 3, writes, "The two sets of ten [minor] triangles [within the *śrīcakra*] have a shining form (*sphuradrūpa*) which depends

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[220] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 130f.

[221] Ibid., 246 n. 53.

upon illumination (*prakāśa*) [of the] ten elements and the ten essences."[222]

This division present at the point between the two sub-*cakras* of ten minor triangles gives rise to a discussion of the place of these ten elements and ten essences. Clearly the intent in making this statement is to differentiate between the elements and their essences as a parallel to contrasting the manifest reality from the unmanifest Reality, or more accurately at this particular juncture, the tangible from the subtle. Scholars point to these elements and essences as the *bhūtas* and *tanmātras* from the bottom of the thirty-six *tattvas*.[223] However, as I described previously, there are only five of each in the universally accepted Tantric catalog of *tattvas*. Bhāskararāya, in his commentary on TrU 3, explains this phenomenon by writing that these two levels consist of the "five subtle elements (*sūkṣmabhūta*) and five physical elements (*sthūlabhūta*); thus there are ten elements. The ten essences (*tanmātras*) beginning with sound arise by dividing these physical and subtle [elements]."[224] The implication, as Brooks notes, is that the ten elements/essences are actually represented by the standard

[222] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 160. Brooks also notes that this verse resembles, but is not identical to YH 1.16 (*Auspicious Wisdom* , 246 n. 52).

[223] Note, though, that the direct mention of the *tattvas* does not arise until the sub-*cakra* of ten minor triangles, leaving open speculation about their place in the emanation at the higher levels of the *śrīcakra*.

[224] Brooks, *Three Cities*, 160.

tattvas in their bilateral rendering.[225] In other words the five *mahābhūtas* (*pṛthivī, jala, tejas, vāyu,* and *ākāśa*) act in both gross and subtle forms, making ten. The same goes for the five *tanmātras* (*gandha, rasa, rūpa, sparśa,* and *śabda*).

The outer set of triangles, referred to as *sarvārthasādhaka,*[226] "that which accomplishes all," is presided over by *Tripurāśrī,* "auspicious Tripurā." The *yoginīs* associated with this level of the *śrīcakra* are classified as *kulottīrṇa,* meaning "crossing beyond the *kula.*" These *yoginīs*, too, are placed around the sub-*cakra* counterclockwise starting at the base. The *kulottīrṇayoginīs* are: *Sarvasiddhipradā, Sarvasaṃpatpradā, Sarvapriyaṅkarī, Sarvamaṅgalakāriṇī, Sarvakāmapradā, Sarvaduḥkhavimocinī, Sarvamṛtyupraśamanī, Sarvavighnanivāriṇī, Sarvāṅgasundarī,* and *Sarvasaubhāgyadāyinī.* According to the second line of KKV 30, the emanation of the outer sub-*cakra* of ten minor triangles brings forth the letters *ca, cha, ja, jha, ña, ka, kha, ga, gha,* and *ṅa.* This ordering of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet matches the ordering of Amṛtānanda, who, in his commentary on YH 1.16, remarks that this second set of ten minor triangles identifies with *Krodhiṣa,* a deity known as the Lord of Anger,

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[225] Ibid., 251 n. 82.

[226] This level is also technically referred to as *bahirdaśāra,* "outer ten."

who, in turn, identifies with the phoneme *ka* and the subsequent nine letters that follow *ka*.[227] Though, again, in the Śrīvidyā ritual manuals of *śrīcakra pūjā*, the emanated letters differ.[228] In the ritual manuals the phonemes *ṇa, ta, tha, da, dha, na, pa, pha, ba,* and, *bha* emerge at this sub-*cakra*. These letters place the sub-*cakra* of the outer ten minor triangles farther away from the Ultimate and closer to the totally objective reality. KKV 31 reads, "The light of these [first] four Cakras is the fully evolved [outer] Cakra of ten triangles."[229] Thus in the emanation of the *śrīcakra*, this fifth sub-*cakra* is the collective product of the first four, implying its separateness and clear progression toward manifestation.

In some regards these two sub-*cakras* finalize the coming together of the mundane world. Their respective groups of *yoginīs* are typically referred to as *devīs*, which elicits a more anthropomorphic understanding of their nature, both at this level of the *śrīcakra* and at this state of the emanation of the manifest reality.[230] These two sets of ten minor triangles,

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[227] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 131.

[228] Ibid., 246 n. 53.

[229] Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa*, 62.

[230] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 130.

though, are still illuminated upon from the *bindu*, *trikoṇa*, etc. above, emphasizing the all-pervasiveness of *śabdabrahman*.

The Outer Set of Fourteen Minor Triangles

Even though the alphabet has technically been completed at this point within the descriptions of some Śrīvidyā texts like the TrU, the *śrīcakra* continues on. The next level, referred to as *sarvasaubhāgyadāyaka,*[231] "that which grants all prosperity," includes fourteen minor triangles reflected from the outer level of ten minor triangles and is presided over by the deity *Tripurāvāsinī*. The corresponding *yoginīs* at this level are referred to as *sampradāya*, "traditional." They are listed as *Sarvasaṃkṣobhinī, Sarvavidrāviṇī, Sarvākarṣiṇī, Sarvāhlādinī, Sarvamohinī, Sarvastaṃbhinī, Sarvajṛṇbhiṇī, Sarvavaśaṅkarī, Sarvarañjinī, Sarvonmādinī, Sarvārthasādhinī, Sarvasampatpūriṇī, Sarvamantramayī*, and *Sarvadvandvakṣayankarī*. Whereas the *yoginīs* were referred to as *devīs* in the previous sub-*cakras*, the *sampradāyayoginīs* are referred to as *śaktis*, emphasizing the element of certain yogic powers (*siddhis*) available to the adept during practice.

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[231] This level is also technically referred to as *manvaśra*.

The fourteen minor triangles at this sub-*cakra* lend themselves to several associations given that particular number's auspicious use in Hindu Tantra. They are aligned with the fourteen *nāḍīs,* "subtle yogic channels" of the nervous system and Bhāskararāya, in his commentary on TrU 3, attributes the next fourteen *tattvas* to these minor triangles, writing:

> And from these [ten essences, i.e. the outer level of ten minor triangles] arose the fourteen, namely the five organs of action, the five organs of knowledge, and the four inner organs.[232]

These *tattvas* are the *karmendriyas,* the *jñānendriyas,* and the *antaḥkaraṇas.* Note that Bhāskararāya refers to the *antaḥkaraṇas* as four in number. This arrangement differs from the Kashmir Śaiva version in which they are only three in number. Brooks notes that the four *antaḥkaraṇas* referred to here are *manas, buddhi, ahaṃkāra,* and *citta.*[233] The final member is "new" to the lineup; no additional information is given in my research.

The final line of KKV 31 reads, "(Then) appeared the Cakra of fourteen triangles wherein are the fourteen vowel letters beginning with *A.*"[234] This includes the simple and complex vowels. It is curious to note

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[232] Brooks, *Three Cities,* 160.

[233] Ibid., 251 n. 83.

[234] Avalon, *Kāma-Kalā-Vilāsa,* 62.

that the emanation of the *svaras*, typically associated with the most subtle levels of the manifestation, arrive here at a level very close to the base of mundane reality. The KKV even says in verse 32 that at this point in the sub-*cakras,* the emanation appears in the form the of *vaikharī* level of sonic reality, blasting forth the fifty-one letters (*a* to *kṣa*) of the Sanskrit alphabet in their grossest form.

This differs from the view of Bhāskararāya and the Śrīvidyā studies of Brooks, where the emergence of *vaikharī* took place at the sub-*cakra* of *trikoṇa.* Yet both versions do place the appearance of the *vaikharī* level of sonic reality as taking place right after the emanation of the *svaras.* Metaphysically, neither of these situations parallel the previously discussed moments of manifestation as the *visarga,* noted either as the catalyst for manifestation or the manifestation itself, is not present. A subtler reading, though, could point to the association of the *bindu*, at the summit of the *śrīcakra,* with the *visarga* and argue that in the Śrīvidyā the true manifestation begins not after the vowels, but before them and all other letters at the dimensionless point at the center of the *yantra.* Graphically and physically, of course, this formulation makes sense, yet the underlying metaphysical underpinnings of the Sanskrit phonemes lend themselves to mysterious interpretation.

The Lotus Petals

The *sarvasaubhāgyadāyaha* sub-*cakra* completes the section of the *śrīcakra* that features the minor triangles emanating out from *bindu*. Next follows the level of eight lotus petals, known as *sarvasaṃkṣobhaṇa*, "that which moves all," and which is presided over by *Tripurasundarī*, the "Lovely Tripurā." The *sarvasaṃkṣobhaṇa*'s *yoginīs* are referred to as *guptatara*, "more concealed," and are named as follows: *Anaṅgakusumā, Anaṅgamekhalā, Anaṅgamadanā, Anaṅgamadanāturā, Anaṅgarekhā, Anaṅgaveginī, Anaṅgānkuśā*, and *Anaṅgamālinī*.

KKV 34 reads, "The eight groups of letter beginning with the Ka group which are Vaikharī-Śakti are on the petals of the lotus of eight petals...,"[235] which explains that this level of the *śrīcakra* represents the eight groups of letters of the Sanskrit alphabet post-*svaras* (*ka-varga, ca-varga, ṭa-varga, ta-varga, pa-varga*, semi-vowels, *ūṣman*, and *kṣa*) as they are understood in the *vaikharī* level of sonic reality. This mention in the KKV is the extent to which the letters are directly connected with this particular sub-*cakra*.

It is interesting to note, though, that considering the *yoginīs* of this sub-*cakra*, the efficacy and outright power of the letters of the Sanskrit

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235 Ibid., 64.

alphabet become slightly illuminated. Brooks notes that the *yoginīs* of this level all begin with *anaṅga*, meaning "limbless," and are all thus "incorporeal deities with the capacity to affect events in the material world."[236] Being as this sub-*cakra* identifies with the *vaikharī* level of sonic reality, recently in terms of the KKV and long since earlier sub-*cakras* in terms of Bhāskararāya, the identification of these petals with the entirety of the manifested letters of the Sanskrit alphabet and their respective representative *yoginī* of transcendent yogic ability should not be taken as coincidental or meaningless. It simply highlights a key aspect of the alphabet as it relates to metaphysical speculation. Letters, as the emanation themselves, encapsulate the divine aspects and powers, and thus through their careful and proper use, the adept can access that *bindu* drop within them.

The next level of the *śrīcakra* stems out of the eight lotus petals and emerges as a level of sixteen lotus petals, known as *sarvāśāparipūraka*, "that which fulfills all hopes." The presiding deity over this sub-*cakra* is *Tripuresī*, "Lordly Tripurā," and the *yoginīs* are classified as *gupta*, meaning "concealed." They are *Kāmākarṣiṇī, Buddhyākarṣiṇī, Ahaṃākarṣiṇī, Śabdākarṣiṇī, Sparśākarṣiṇī, Rūpākarṣiṇī, Rasākarṣiṇī, Gandhākarṣiṇī,*

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236 Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, 135.

Cittākarṣiṇī, Dharyākarṣiṇī, Smṛtyākarṣiṇī, Nāmākarṣiṇī, Bījākarṣiṇī, Ātmākarṣiṇī, Amṛtākarṣiṇī and *Śarīrākarṣiṇī.*

According to KKV 33, this sub-*cakra* represents the sixteen vowels from *a* to *aḥ*, the third location on the *śrīcakra* identified with the *svaras.* Again the connection with the sixteen phases of the moon becomes apparent as these *yoginīs* are also referred to as *nityākalāyoginīs*, which act at this sub-*cakra* more as attributes of the corresponding *nityādevatās* of the *trikoṇa* than the divine beings themselves, emphasizing the subtle decline in power while moving outward from the center of the *śrīcakra.*[237] Thus the two sub-*cakras* of lotus petals encapsulate the entire Sanskrit alphabet and offer another microcosm of the macrocosmic *śrīcakra.* The distance from the *bindu* and the direct emergence of *vaikharī*, though, emphasize this final representation of the complete alphabet as the mundane version seen in language and corporeal speech.

The remaining parts of the *śrīcakra* are the three circles that surround the level of sixteen lotus petals and the open or closed gateway that contains the whole *yantra.* While both of these elements carry significant metaphysical and philosophical significance, the considerations as they relate to the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet cease at the sixteen

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[237] Ibid., 163.

petals, and thus for the purposes of this study they will not be discussed. For more on these elements and more in depth information on all the elements of the *śrīcakra* see the sixth chapter of *Auspicious Wisdom* by Douglas Renfew Brooks.

Thus concludes the general emanation of the the manifest world through the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet as understood through the Śrīvidyā school of Hindu Tantrism.

CHAPTER V

PĀÑCARĀTRA

The final school of Hindu Tantra that I wish to cover in this study is the Viṣṇu-centered line of Tantra, representing the Saṃhitā "collection" of works, Pāñcarātra.[238] Pāñcarātra ties itself back to the Vedas and, in some regards, considers its texts to be the direct extension of the Vedas.[239] Similar to the other schools of Tantra in its most general aspects, Pāñcarātra deals almost exclusively with the view of Śakti as Lakṣmī, consort to Viṣṇu. Much of the Pāñcarātra doctrine, philosophy, and theology comes in the Lakṣmī Tantra, a relatively later text that appears somewhere between the ninth and twelfth centuries CE.[240]

Continuing the Tantric importance of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, the Lakṣmī Tantra devotes three of its chapters exclusively to discussing the emanation of the phonemes and their mystic use during resorption. Throughout the LT the speaker is Śakti in the Pāñcarātra form of Lakṣmī, goddess and consort to Viṣṇu. As with the format of most Tantras, the LT is structured as a conversation between a subject and a

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238 Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism,* 10.

239 Ibid., 15.

240 Bhattacharyya, *Tantrābhidhāna*, 85.

form of the ultimate Divine. Unlike most Tantras, however, the LT features Śrī herself as the teacher, whereas usually the Goddess is learning from Śiva or some other representation of the pure Ultimate.

As the majority of information regarding the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet remains common throughout Hindu Tantra, this final section of my study will be relatively concise and limited to just the specifics of the Pāñcarātra take on the place of letters in the mystic process.

General Understanding of the Sanskrit Alphabet

The Pāñcarātra school of Hinduism extends further back than either of the two previously studied traditions, yet its recognition as Tantric emerges later and is contentiously debated. Goudriaan notes, "...the Pāñcarātrins-the followers of 'Tantric Vaiṣṇavism'-decline to be called Tantrics because they do not want to be considered worshipers of the Mother Goddess."[241] Indeed, much of the foundation for the cosmogony of the manifest universe as it relates to the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet emerge in the early Pāñcarātra texts, only to be assimilated later into the heavily structured theories of Kashmir Śaivism and Śrīvidyā discussed above. The later writings of Pāñcarātra, such as the

[241] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 9.

LT, however, certainly have the necessary elements of Tantric ideology and thought.

Pāñcarātra understands *mātṛkā* (the Sanskrit alphabet) as the manifestation of *viṣṇuśakti*,[242] a culmination of fifty *śaktis*[243] corresponding to the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.[244] The process takes place as the Ultimate evolves into the manifest universe, descending from the complete unmanifest to the level of gross language and speech. The first stage of the subtle differentiation is *śabdabrahman*, which derives directly out of the Ultimate in the form of Śakti. LT 18.18 reads, "I (śabdabrahman) am essentially consciousness and bliss, the source of all mantras; the absolute; the mother of all sound; Śakti not subjected to appearance and disappearance."[245] Here, Lakṣmī reiterates her differentiated status as *śabdabrahman* in addition to maintaining her pervasion in all forms of reality. As she emanates into the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, it

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[242] LT 20.32-33.

[243] Gupta, Hoens, and Goudriaan, *Hindu Tantrism*, 97.

[244] Although no direct mention is made to this technicality, my study has led me to understand that the fifty letters spoken of in the LT are the same fifty of the Śrīvidyā minus the vedic cerebral *ḷa*.

[245] Gupta, *Lakṣmī Tantra*, 99.

becomes clear how literally she claims to be the source of all mantras. LT 18.39-42 elaborate on the pervasion:

> Mantras that are of an efficacious and beneficial nature replete with me; phonetic units; parts of speech; sentences as well as treatises (*prakaraṇa*) and subdivisions (*āhnikas*); parts of texts such as chapters, paragraphs, cants, ucchvāsas, paṭalas etc.; praśnas; vāks, anuvāks; maṇḍalas; kāṇḍas and diverse saṃhitās; Ṛk, Yajus and Sāman;[246] sūktas as well as khilas; words forming śāstras and tantras; also the external (public) and internal (esoteric) āgamas and all the various languages - all these fall under direct or indirect speech (*gīr*).[247]

Thus throughout the *vaikharī* level of sonic reality, she forms the foundational dynamism present and efficaciously understood in all forms of sound, whether it be in sacred mantra or even just in the prosaic parts of a conversational sentence. LT 20.6-8 continue this thread:

> I (the same Śakti) am the essence of light and bliss endowed with perfect equilibrium. When in order to liberate the jīvas, my own śakti activates merely a ten millionth of a hundred-thousand-billionth fraction of myself, I then automatically evolve out of the great God into Śabdabrahman.
>
> Consider this unmanifested eternal (Śabdabrahman) as resembling the faint sound produced by (the automatic vibration of) the strings (of a musical instrument. That (faint sound) is indeed multiplied by numerous other sounds (*varṇa*) in order to sustain (creation).[248]

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[246] Note the omission of the Atharva Veda, typically the one associated with Tantra.

[247] Gupta, *Lakṣmī Tantra,* 102.

[248] Ibid., 109.

Again Lakṣmī states how she emerges from the Ultimate, even in such a minute form, to pervade the resulting creation. Here that creation is described as the multiplication of that "faint sound" into *varṇas*, or letters. It is interesting to note here that in contrast to the presentation of the emanation of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in Kashmir Śaivism and Śrīvidyā, this verse of the LT notes the purpose of the phonemes as sustaining, not merely creating. The obvious tie here to the generalized role of Viṣṇu as the maintainer likely explains the peculiarity.

The Emanation of the Alphabet

The eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-third, chapters of the LT describe the mysticism of the alphabet from the point of view of Śrī, describing the letters both as they emerge within her self and as they resorb back into her self. As the focus of this study is the emanation, I will be concentrating on the former. Chapter nineteen begins, "I am the primary, total I-hood of Hari, characterized by the creative urge (*sisṛkṣā*). Being the supreme Śakti manifest as creation, I become creatively active."[249] The emanation of the Sanskrit alphabet is the manifestation of

[249] Ibid., 104.

the dynamic feminine energy inherent within the Ultimate, here described as Hari, or Viṣṇu, flowing from *a* to *sa*.

Once at the level of *vaikharī*, Śakti begins the mundane manifestation, starting at the sonic state of *ekapadī*.[250] Here she is literally one sound, the *śabdabrahman*, in its most blissful subtle state. She then splits into the sound denoting and the object denoted, marking the *dvipadī* sonic state. At this state she emphasizes the dual nature of sound in that in any utterance, both the aspects of the manifest and unmanifest are fully, yet subtly, present. *Dvipadī* is soon followed by the *catuṣpadī* state, in which she has divided into the four broad categories of the Sanskrit alphabet: *ūṣman* (*śa, ṣa, sa,* and *ha*), *antaḥstha* (*ya, ra, la,* and *va*), *svaras* (the vowels), and *sparśa* (the consonants). These categories of sounds denote the coming of four types of unmanifest qualities: *dravya* (objects), *jāti* (genus), *guṇa* (quality or element), and *kriyā* (action) respectively.[251] She then splits into the familiar eight categories of letters (*svaras, ka-varga, ca-varga, ṭa-varga, ta-varga, pa-varga,* the semi-vowels, *ūṣman,* and *kṣa*) under the state of *aṣṭapadī*. Here, the four types of unmanifest qualities of *catuṣpadī* are each represented in their dual nature as both the object and

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[250] LT 18.30

[251] LT 18.31, 33-34

its name, equalling eight total. *Aṣṭapadī* is followed with the addition of the unvoiced sounds such as *visarga* in the sonic state of *navapadī*.[252] In the context of the eight aspects of *aṣṭapadī*, the *navapadī* exemplifies the x + 1 structure of counting by acting as both the whole and the final member.

The Vowels

Verse two of the nineteenth chapter of the LT begins by naming the fifteen vowels *a* through *aṃ* as Lakṣmī's "similar" states of existence (*daśā*). She names *a* as her "eternal essence" in regard to *vāc*, representing self-revealed consciousness at its most subtle phonic form. LT 19.3 introduces the second *svara*, *ā*, as the result of *a* achieving the state of *ānanda*. Here again, as with the previous Tantric versions of the emanation, the initial phoneme, *a*, carries enormous linguistic, phonetic and metaphysical weight. It is seen as not only the foundational part and source of all the vowels, but as essential to the pronunciation, and thus efficaciousness, of the Sanskrit consonants.

LT 19.4 introduces *i* as *icchā*, *ī* as *īśāna*, *u* as *unmeṣa*, and *ū* as *ūrja*. Verses five through seven bring forth the middle "liquid" vowels, (*ṛ*, *ṝ*, *ḷ*, and *ḹ*) as modifications of *i* (*icchā*), *ī* (*īśāna*), *u* (*unmeṣa*), and *ū* (*ūrja*)

[252] LT 18.32, 35

respectively. The vocalic liquids are followed by the letter *e* as a combination of the first vowel, *a*, with *i (icchā)* and *ai* (named *jagadyoni*) as a combination of *i* (*icchā*) and *ā* (*ānanda*). Verse 16.51 of ABS, an earlier Pāñcarātra text from about the fourth or fifth century CE,[253] identifies *ai* as *aiśvaryavān*, meaning "endowed with power."[254] The vowel *o* appears as the combination of the first vowel, *a*, and *u* (*unmeṣa*) while *au* (called *sadyojāta*) comes from the combination of *a* with the recently formed *o*. ABS 16.52 names *o* as *ota*, "invoked," and *au* as *aurjitya*, or "characterized by its potency."[255]

It should be noted here that ABS 16.48-52 places the vocalic liquids after the diphthongs and identifies the diphthongs with the term *kūṭa*, typically used in relation with *kṣa*.[256] *Kūṭa*, a neuter noun, often refers to a bone in the front of the head (a horn) or the summit of a mountain, likely alluding to the peak of some object, event or experience. Its frequent use with *kṣa* exemplifies the x + 1 of its function, representing itself, as well as all the letters before it, at the peak of a reversed mountain. In other words,

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253 Bhattacharyya, *Tantrābhidhāna*, 7.

254 Padoux, *Vāc*, 269 n. 132.

255 Ibid., 269 n. 133.

256 Ibid., 263 n. 115.

kṣa is the summit of manifestation as viewed from the bottom up. A possible explanation for the use of *kūṭa* in regard to diphthongs placed before the vocalic liquids resides in the underlying micro/macrocosmic sexual symbolism inherent in any tantric explanation of the emanation of the universe. If the vocalic liquids are understood as an unproductive pause during the initial buildup of potentiality within the Ultimate, then the diphthongs as *kūṭa* represent a moment of peak experience reached before the pause, representing both the culmination of potentiality as well as the experience of the ultimate energy. In other words, this alignment in ABS expresses the yogic pause at its highest possible experience of the dynamism of the Divine instead of allowing more buildup after the pause, thereby allowing the adept to have the potential to retain the physical emanation at its highest possible undifferentiated state.

Verse seven of the nineteenth chapter of the LT concludes by explaining that the nature of these vowels as movement toward the more mundane level of existence (*vaikharī*) is due to the fact that even the high-level vowels are still derivations from the original *a*. Gupta notes that the purpose here is to point out that the differentiation present at *vaikharī*

contrasts with the completely unpolarized nature of the earlier *nāda* and *bindu* states, and the potentially polarized sound present at *madhyamā*.[257]

LT 19.8-9 explain the emergence of the final vowel in this rendering. *Aṃ* appears at the point in the emanation at which the previous thirteen vowels (*ā* to *au*) reach their most subtle stage of pure knowledge. The verse implies that while *a*, directly representing the unmanifest, is the origin of all the vowels, *aṃ* represents their culmination and annihilation in the sense of both x + 1 and in terms of acting as a microcosm of the greater emanation of the alphabet. As we have seen in the other Tantric schools, the *svaras* are emanated within the Ultimate as it prepares for the manifestation of truly mundane objects, and thus this mini-emanation of vowels within Lakṣmī serves to accentuate both the potentiality and the inherent and dynamic diversity on the verge of gross emanation.

The explanation of the *visarga* does not come up until LT 18.20 but in keeping with order I will skip to it now. The *visarga*, *aḥ*, acts as the pure x + 1 element in the emanation of the vowels, representing both itself and the culmination of *a* through *aṃ*. As with the Kashmir Śaiva explanation, *aḥ* represents the creative agent in the emanation, meaning that, due to its x + 1 nature, it contains both the creative (*aḥ*) and destructive (*aṃ*) aspects

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[257] Gupta, *Lakṣmī Tantra*, 104 n. 5.

of the Ultimate. Here also LT 19.20-29 bring in the symbolism of the sun and moon often associated with *aṃ* and *aḥ*. They are said to be two *devayoḥ*, "luminaries," each having seven rays of light, corresponding to the fourteen letters of the alphabet already emanated. *Aṃ* as the *sūrya* (sun) form contains the letters *a, i, u, ṛ, ḷ, e,* and *o* as its rays, which are referred to in LT 19.24 as *śoṣaka*, "that which dries up," augmenting its destructive nature. These seven rays are characterized by "light, sharpness, pervasiveness, assimilation (the mind's capacity to grasp, *grahaṇa*), projection (*kṣepaṇa*), agitation (*īraṇa*), and maturity (*pāka*),"[258] respectively. *Aḥ* as the *soma* (moon) form contains the letters *ā, ī, ū, ṝ, ḹ, ai,* and *au* as its rays, which are referred to in LT 19.25 as nourishing, adding to its creative nature. These seven rays are characterized by "fluidity, coolness, calmness, loveliness, contentment, delight, and bliss,"[259] respectively.

The vowels reach completion in a culmination of incredible potentiality. LT 19.28-29 reads:

> The great sṛṣṭi (śakti) Mahānadā, adorned with clusters of millions of śaktis - resplendent with these rays consisting of Agni (i.e. *Sūrya*) and the moon and manifesting herself by

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[258] Ibid., 106f.

[259] Ibid., 107.

> embodying...the Person in the form of bindu (which represents the state of existence) consecutively following the Soma-form - appears actively as the final vowel (*ḥ*).[260]

The Consonants

Having completed the inner emanation of the vowels, Lakṣmī now seeks to actively create. Armed with fifteen limbs (the vowels *a* to *aṃ*),[261] she creates the mundane universe with the twenty-five standard *tattvas* (*puruṣa* to *pṛthivī*) in addition to some others. Unlike the Kashmir Śaivas, the phoneme-*tattva* relationship in Pāñcarātra is not clear cut. While most of them are similar, a few are missing and a few are doubled, as we will see. The LT breaks down the consonants into three groups: *ka* to *ma*, which represent the material, objective, and completely differentiated state of the divine presence in the manifestation; *śa* to *ha* and *kṣa*, which represent the unpolarized and absolute state of the divine presence in the manifestation; and the semi-vowels (*ya* to *va*), which represent an intermediate state through which meditation can transverse between the absolute and the differentiated.[262]

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[260] Ibid.

[261] Recall that *aḥ* represents the culmination itself (i.e. x + 1).

[262] Gupta, *Lakṣmī Tantra*, 105 n. 2.

LT 19.13-16 begin with this intermediate state, referring to it as *dhāraṇā*, a deep and singly focused meditation. *Ya* represents *kriyāśakti* being said to consist of "a piece of (Śakti's) active (aspect)..."[263] While not directly stated, this implies its alignment with the *kalā tattva*, representing creativity. *Ya* is also referred to here as *vāta*. *Ra*, referred to as *repha* and *pāvaka*, represents the *vidyā tattva* by consisting of a piece of her *jñāna* aspect. *La*, somehow regarded as *pṛthivī*, though not apparently in the *tattvic* sense, represents *māyā tattva*. *Va*, referred to as *Varuṇa* and holding the essence of joy, represents *rāga tattva*. These four phonemes act as a middle ground between the absolute and relative, or *parā* and *aparā*. LT 19.34 describes these phonemes as representing the four states of existence: *ya* represents *jāgrat*, the waking state; *ra* represents *svapna*, the dream state; *la* represents *suṣupti*, the deep sleep state; and *va* represents *turīya*, the transcendental state.

The absolute state of phonemes within the manifestation are represented by *ūṣman* and *kṣa*. LT 19.16 refers to these letters as *pañcabrahman*, the five-fold pure Brahman, which represents *Satya* and the four *Vyūhas* (the four characteristics of the four manifestations of the Ultimate), acting together as five aspects of the *kriyāśakti* of the Divine in

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[263] Ibid., 105.

creative action. *Śa* represents the *Vyūha Aniruddha*, the *pṛthivī tattva*, and the divine attribute *bala*. *Ṣa* represents the *Vyūha Pradyumna*, the *jala tattva*, and the divine attribute *vīrya*. *Sa* represents the *Vyūha Saṃkarṣaṇa*, the *tejas tattva*, and the divine attribute *tejas*. *Ha* represents the *Vyūha Vāsudeva*, the *vāyu tattva*, and the divine attribute *śakti*. *Kṣa* represents the powerful and culminating *śakti Satya*, the *ākāśa tattva*, and the divine attribute *aiśvarya*.[264] The five *śaktis* within these five phonemes serve as the cause of the manifestation of the universe. LT 19.33 compares the power within these phonemes to the power to burn inherent in a great fire.

The absolute group (*śa* to *kṣa*) and intermediate, *dhāraṇā* group (*ya* to *va*) are separated from the created, *prakṛti* group of letters (*bha* to *ka*) by the letter *ma*, which plays the role of a transitory phoneme unique to the Pāñcarātra structure of the alphabet. It is depicted as a sort of microcosm of the semi-vowels, representing a transitory aspect of the ultimate Reality that Lakṣmī claims is necessary to make the evolution or devolution from Brahman to differentiated reality. She states, in LT 19.38, "Therefore at my bidding the dhāraṇās are manifested out of myself. Hence the person known as bhoktṛ (i.e. jīva) represents a fourfold state (of existence)."[265]

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[264] Ibid., 105f n. 1-4.

[265] Ibid., 107.

This same act of manifestation, then, emerges in the phoneme *ma*, which then moves into the remaining consonants.

Lakṣmī, in LT 19.39, says of *ma*:

> *Ma*, capable of enjoying (the fruits of the jīva's activities) and at the same time capable of achieving emancipation, is a direct offshoot of myself...for the purpose of creating objects of enjoyment for this person to delight in.[266]

Thus *ma* ushers in the purely objective version of reality, filled with variety for the adept. This line accentuates the Tantric understanding of the pure divinity of even the objective world and the necessity for the truly wise to enjoy the manifest world for this inherent, though hidden, divinity. Before the manifestation can truly differentiate, though, LT 19.40 describes the phoneme *bha* as representing a womb emerging from Lakṣmī with an "insentient, supreme, subtle equilibrium of the guṇas"[267]

This womb, subtly different than the state of transition at *ma*, produces the twenty-three letters of the objective world, along with the corresponding twenty-three lowest *tattvas*.[268] The first three letters to emerge are the remaining phonemes of the *pa-varga* (*ba*, *pha*, and *pa*),

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[266] Ibid., 107f.

[267] Ibid., 108.

[268] LT 19.41-44

which represent *buddhi, ahaṃkāra,* and *manas* respectively. Then follows the dental phonemes and the *jñānendriyas* with *na* representing *śrotra, dha* representing *tvak, da* representing *cakṣu, tha* representing *rasanā,* and *ta* representing *ghrāṇa.* Next are the cerebrals and the *karmendriyas* with *ṇa* representing *vā, ḍha* representing *pāṇi, ḍa* representing *pāda, ṭha* representing *pāyu,* and *ṭa* representing *upastha.* Then emerge the palatals and the *tanmātras* with *ña* representing *śabda, jha* representing *sparśa, ja* representing *rūpa, cha* representing *rasa,* and *ca* representing *gandha.* Finally come the most mundane of phonemes and elements, the gutturals and the *mahābhūtas* (in the LT referred to as "subtle elements"[269]) with *ṅa* representing *ākāśa, gha* representing *vāyu, ga* representing *tejas, kha* representing *jala,* and *ka* representing *pṛthivī.*

Thus concludes the emanation of the manifest universe through the Sanskrit alphabet as described by the Goddess Lakṣmī, the divine Ultimate of the Pāñcarātra school of Hindu Tantrism.

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[269] Gupta, *Lakṣmī Tantra,* 108.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The general intent of this study is not to formulate some grand conclusion on the issues discussed herein and, indeed, one of the greatest essences of studying the Hindu tradition is the sheer impossibility to provide any type of all-encompassing amalgam of its facets. Therefore, any sort of synthesis would be both inconsistent with this project and highly disingenuous to the subject matter. Instead, I hope that what one derives from this study is simply a more comprehensive understanding of just how the phonemes and letters of the Sanskrit alphabet interrelate with the metaphysics of Hindu Tantra.

The Śaivism of Kashmir developed an intricate expansion of Vedic and Upaniṣadic notions of the phonemes and their correspondences with the *tattvas* of both the manifest and unmanifest reality. The tradition illustrates a cyclical cosmogony that begins and ends with the absolute Śiva, while in the meantime scales up, down, and in between the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet. The apparent disorder of language is caused by viewing reality though the layers of manifestation, veiling the higher structure of the alphabet. Yet this seeming chaos also represents the greater truth, that even in the structure and oneness of the Absolute, an inherent dynamism, embodied in Śakti, pervades the universe.

The Śrīvidyā school borrows much of its syllabic metaphysics from the Śaiva schools and elaborates upon it through their heavy use of the *śrīcakra*. This widely recognizable *yantra* not only represents all of reality in its typically two-dimensional graphic form, but also is seen as *being* all Reality in its three-dimensional understanding. It is a metaphysical fractal which seems to constantly contradict itself in its representation of the Sanskrit letters and their placement in the emanation of the manifest universe. The higher understanding, however, allows one to see the *śrīcakra* and the phonemes as omnipresent from any scale, starting from the immeasurable *bindu* point to the outer petals. Any one sub-*cakra* encompasses the entirety just as does the whole *śrīcakra*, again emphasizing the inherent dynamic unity within the very real diversity.

Finally, the Pāñcarātra school of Hindu Tantra presents only a slight derivation on the themes of the first two schools. Whereas the Śaiva school of Kashmir and the Śrīvidyā school operated around the central premise of Śiva and Śakti, Pāñcarātra narrates its cosmogonic emanation around Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, the Vaiṣṇavite versions of the supreme masculine and feminine aspects of Reality. The central delineation of the manifestation of the universe, though, remains in line with the emanation of the manifest

world from a single dynamic oneness outward into varying degrees of differentiation.

And so, as we ascend from the depths of intricate detail and lofty metaphysical interpretation, we have to take a step back from this study and consider what exactly we can derive from it as scholars of South Asian religion and as human beings in general. The scholar of religion would be lax in their craft if they were to just take the information presented in this essay as technical jargon aimed at creating archival lists. The aspects of the Hindu Tantric tradition described in this study are real and functioning elements of a human spiritual tradition and we, as observers and chroniclers of these traditions, cannot lose sight of the inherently human implications therein. Often the study of the humanities forgets that which makes its study so important, the human being, an intrinsically dynamic and varied figure.

As observant human beings, then, we must apply this knowledge and understanding to our work. We must be able to see the implications of the multifarious elements coinciding with the seemingly simplistic phonetic particles of language. In this specific case of the Sanskrit language and the Hindu Tantric religion, the phonemes are the dynamism of perceived reality. Lalan Prasad Singh writes:

> Each and every letter from *a* to *kṣa* of Mātṛkā Varṇa is living energy. They are the acoustic root of the different waves and vibrations of the cosmos. These letters are the representative sonoric manifestations of the universe.[270]

The phonemes and letters are blueprints, tools, guides, and clues to the true nature of Reality. They are the diversity within the unity. They are the keys to the deeper structure of the universe and the hints to the true relation of ourselves, and all we experience in the manifest world, to the Absolute.

[270] Singh, *Tantra: Its Mystic and Scientific Basis*, 80.

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